

U.S.-VENEZUELA RELATIONS AND THE PATH TO A DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN
HEMISPHERE, TRANSNATIONAL
CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

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THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2019

U.S. SENATE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
TRANSNATIONAL CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY, DEMOCRACY,
HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m. in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Marco Rubio, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Rubio [presiding], Risch, Gardner, Barrasso, Cruz, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, Udall, and Kaine.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MARCO RUBIO, U.S. SENATOR FROM FLORIDA

Senator RUBIO. Good morning. I would like to welcome you to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues. We have a huge portfolio in this subcommittee.

But today's hearing is about the United States and Venezuela and the path to a democratic transition. Obviously, it is timely and it is urgent.

We have two panels today. On the first panel we are going to hear from two witnesses from the executive branch, the Honorable Mark Green, who is the Administrator at USAID, and the Honorable Elliott Abrams, who is our U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela. We thank you both for taking the time to be here. I know our members are very interested in this topic.

We will have a second panel of non-government experts, Mr. Eric Farnsworth, the Vice President of the Council of the Americas, and Dr. Cynthia Arnson, the Director of the Wilson Center's Latin America Program.

I want to thank all of you for being here. Eric was with us last year around this time, in April, speaking about the Summit of the Americas. I want to thank him for joining us again, and so forth.

And before I go to my opening remarks, the Chairman of the full committee is with us, Senator Risch, and his leadership on the committee is off to a great start, and I wanted to recognize him for some remarks at the outset.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you very much, Chairman Rubio, for holding this subcommittee hearing. It is one of what I hope will be many. In consultation with yourself, as you know, and with the other subcommittee chairmen, we are encouraging having these kind of hearings that are able to drill down better than the whole committee can on specific issues regarding specific regions.

My hope is, and I know I share this with you, that this hearing will underscore our support for the Venezuelan people and for the legitimate president of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. I think our friends in the media would be very helpful, as we try to transition towards much more stability there, to refer to Mr. Maduro as the ex-president of Venezuela and not as the president. There is only one president of Venezuela right now, and that is Juan Guaidó.

The Venezuelan people are to be commended for using the rule of law to transition, as civilized people do. Section 233 of the constitution provided for a way to make a change. They have done so. They have done so properly. They have done so under rule of law, as civilized people do, and we in America want to recognize that and extend our appreciation for that, and do all we can to help the Venezuelan people accomplish what they set out to do under Section 233 of the constitution.

Finally, let me say that this is not a partisan issue. This is a bipartisan issue. I think everyone recognizes it, and we need to pursue it in that vein.

So again, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am here to support you in your efforts to do this.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you for coming this morning.

So, I want to begin my remarks by answering the question of why should we care. It is the most important question that we must always answer anytime the U.S. takes a foreign policy step. Why should America care about what is happening? In particular, why should America care about what is happening in Venezuela and democracy and the support for the interim government of President Juan Guaidó?

Let me begin by saying the first reason is that the humanitarian, political, and economic crisis is not just a Venezuelan crisis. It is a regional crisis. Since the year 2014, 3.4 million, by many estimates, Venezuelans have fled Venezuela. That is 10 percent of the nation's population that has left the country.

As a point of reference, it would be the equivalent—if we said 10 percent of the U.S. population had left over five years, it would be the equivalent of every person living in Florida, Maryland, and Massachusetts leaving the country over a five-year period.

Beyond that, over 80 percent of them have migrated into the region, into Latin America. About half of them are in Colombia, in one country. Today, Colombia in particular, but also Peru and Ecuador, are bearing the brunt of the cost of this mass migration.

Further exacerbating it is that the United Nations has already projected that if all things continue on the current path, this year alone—and I mean the current path before the events of January—they estimated that this year alone another 2 million Venezuelans will leave the country. And I am here to tell you that if another

2 million people leave, on top of the 3.4 million that have already left, and 80 percent of them stay in Latin America, it will deteriorate and potentially collapse the public services of Colombia and severely impact the same in Peru and in Ecuador and in other nations.

This has the potential to be a regional catastrophe of epic proportions. It is already at that level. And that is reason alone to care about it, because the United States will be directly impacted by that, in particular because of our close partnership with Colombia.

The bottom line is if Maduro remains in power and things do not get better, it threatens to trigger a cataclysmic crisis in our closest ally at this moment in South America, in Colombia, our improving relationship with Ecuador, and our important partnership with Peru.

The second reason why we should care is because the Maduro crime family, the Maduro regime, actively, not secretly, not covertly, actively participates in the trafficking of cocaine. Planes filled with cocaine operate out of Venezuelan airfields under the auspices and protection of the Venezuelan military, and they deliver cocaine to airstrips in Central America. That cocaine is then handed over to drug networks, drug networks that along the way destabilize El Salvador and Honduras and Guatemala, exacerbating the migratory patterns that we are seeing on our southern border. And then that cocaine enters the United States and winds up in our streets and in the hands of Americans, all under the auspices of the Maduro regime, who charges a fee for this service of escorting drug shipments out of Venezuela.

By the way, if you do not pay them their fee, they shoot down your plane. If you pay them the fee, they get rich and you get to traffic cocaine, and we see the flights, and they are protected by them.

The third reason we should care is that the Maduro regime provides safe harbor to terrorist groups like the ELN, the group that just killed over 20 police cadets in Colombia in a bombing, and they provide auspices and protection and safe harbor to other narco-terror groups. What I mean by that is these groups operate openly, openly in camps within Venezuelan territory, not hidden camps, not covert, clandestine camps, open camps that you can see from commercial satellite imagery, and they stage attacks against Colombia from Venezuela, and they too traffic in drugs destined for the United States, and they do all of this with the full support, the full cooperation and the protection of the Maduro regime, who, by the way, also gets a cut of those proceeds.

The fourth reason we should care is that the regime has openly and repeatedly invited Russia and Vladimir Putin to conduct military operations in our hemisphere from their territory. They have offered them openly an air and naval base free of charge for the Russians to operate from. In fact, just a few months ago, two nuclear-capable Russian bombers flew a mission into the Caribbean Sea from an airbase in Venezuela.

The fifth reason we should care is the Maduro crime family has close ties to the regime in Iran. In fact, even as we speak, Maduro is working to offer the Iranians tons of gold stolen from the gold reserves of Venezuela in exchange for Iranian projects and services,

and there are no projects or services offered by the Iranian regime that are good for the United States.

And sixth, as if we needed any more reasons to care, in their thirst for hard currency, the Maduro regime is irresponsibly, recklessly, and irreparably mining for gold to sell in global markets, and it is doing so in a way that is creating an irreversible ecological and environmental disaster in some of the most sensitive areas of Venezuela, and future Venezuelans and, frankly, the region will pay a price for this extraordinary economic catastrophe that has not received nearly enough attention.

So, they are destabilizing our closest partners in South America; they are driving violence in Central America with the drugs that they are helping to ship, which is, of course, exacerbating illegal migration; they are pumping cocaine into our streets; they are providing Putin a military foothold in our hemisphere; they are providing gold to Iran; they are destroying the national environment. It is a very compelling reason to care about what is happening.

The Maduro regime is a clear danger and threat to the national interests, and I would argue the national security, of the United States. This, sadly, is not a new issue for me. It has been in the news a lot lately, but I have been working on this topic, along with Senator Menendez, since as far back as 2014, 2013, and we have been working closely and speaking out about this since that time.

The situation grows more dire by the day. It is hard to imagine. Venezuela was once the wealthiest country in South America—not 100 years ago, not 50 years ago, but within the lifetime of everyone in this room.

Now, the people of Venezuela are the subject of daily blackouts, empty store shelves, devastating shortages of food and medicine, and a dehumanizing scramble to survive. And lest anyone think this is the product of sanctions from the last four to six weeks, that is a fraud, that is a lie. This has been going on for years because they have stolen the money. They steal all of the money. None of the proceeds, none of the money they are making from any of this is going into the hands of anyone but a small group of cronies who live a life of luxury around the world—their families most certainly do—while the people of Venezuela suffer.

These 3.4 million people who left Venezuela over the last five years left well before any sanctions imposed over the last five weeks. And previous to that, by the way, all of the sanctions were imposed on individuals, not on the government, not on the economy.

In 2018, a study found that 90 percent of Venezuelans, an estimated 31 million people, live in poverty, and worse. Venezuelan citizens involuntarily lost, on average, 24 pounds in the previous year, which is a stunning statistic when all of their leaders are overweight. All the leaders of Venezuela are overweight, and yet the people, on average, are losing 24 pounds in a year.

Chronic infections and diseases are rampant, and hospitals lack adequate supplies to care for their patients. We have picture number one over there. It shows a malnourished child in Dr. Domingo Luciani Hospital in Caracas, Venezuela. These are images we are used to seeing in other regions in the world, not the Western Hemisphere. This is the condition of children who today are dying, dying

in Venezuelan hospitals. The Pan American Health Organization has indicated that outbreaks of diphtheria, measles and malaria have spread in the country, which, by the way, also has a regional impact. Other areas of public health concerns also include HIV/AIDS patients who have been denied medications and are going to die if they do not receive delivery of those medications, not to mention an increase in maternal and infant mortality, limited access to medicines, and adequate care for people with life-threatening chronic conditions. Perhaps the most compelling of all is those in need of dialysis.

Without objection, I would like to introduce for the record PAHO's response on the need to maintain an effective technical cooperation agenda in Venezuela and neighboring countries. These are important statistics to keep in mind.

[The information referred to can be found at the end of this document:]

Senator RUBIO. Shortages of food and medicine and the total collapse of social services have created a humanitarian crisis and, as I mentioned earlier, migration flows that are destabilizing the entire region, including, as I have already mentioned, Venezuela's neighbors. I witnessed that firsthand in my visit to Colombia just two weeks ago.

I would caution that over the next few weeks—and I say this with a sense of urgency that I cannot overstate—Venezuela, because of graft and corruption and the unwillingness of the Maduro regime to allow humanitarian aid to be delivered in the country by anyone, frankly, although they claim that they are open to it—they still deny that there is a humanitarian crisis despite compelling evidence to the contrary. Over the next few weeks, Venezuela is going to enter a period of suffering no nation in our hemisphere has confronted in modern history.

As of today, Venezuela has about six or seven days left of fuel supplies, this in the most oil-rich country in the world, and this is because they have destroyed the domestic production capacity. Venezuela is just a handful of days away from running out of basic staples—wheat and corn meal and cooking oil—again because of complete and utter mismanagement. I assure you, none of the regime cronies are going to go hungry, but millions of Venezuelans will continue to grow hungry, and exacerbated in a way we have not seen.

I regret to report that the suffering people of Venezuela are about to experience the most dramatic shortages they have ever faced, the implications of which we cannot fully predict, but none of it is due to any of the actions taken by the United States up to this point. It is entirely the result of the fact that its leaders have stolen literally everything they can get their hands on, and continue to do that to this very moment.

The regime, in fact, has used the suffering as a political weapon. Forty-two percent of the people in Venezuela depend on a government food program they call CLAP. First of all, it is also the subject of corruption. That food is imported. The cronies steal a percentage of it to resell on the private market for their own profit, and then the rest is distributed to those who are compliant or loyal to the regime. So if you go to a Maduro rally, you get food. If you

do not show up at the rally, you do not get your CLAP box. If you vote for Maduro, and they know how you voted, you get food. If you do not vote, or do not vote for him, you do not get food. They have used it as a weapon.

This is why he objects to humanitarian aid, because he does not want to lose the leverage that he has over the people of Venezuela by using food and medicine against them as a weapon, and that is why the United States and our partners from around the world have provided and stationed food and medicine on the border, to try to avoid this humanitarian catastrophe, not to politicize it but to prevent the mass, not just human suffering, but additional mass migration that threatens to destabilize the region.

And because denying people food is one of the ways the regime controls the population, that is why two weeks ago we watched the Maduro regime violently and brutally block food from entering the country. Any regime who is threatened by food and medicine, that tells you everything you need to know about them. They did not just block it, by the way; they burned it. They set it on fire. You see in picture number two a truck carrying humanitarian aid was burned on the Francisco de Paolo Santa Bridge, set on fire by armed criminal gangs of the Maduro regime; aid, by the way, that non-violent civilians begged them to allow in. In picture number three, right here before me, you see a woman kneeling in front of the National Guard officials, begging them to permit the entrance of humanitarian aid.

The regime's response, by the way, was not just to use military force, but they have armed paramilitary gangs. They have armed these paramilitary gangs that operate in these little scooters. They have armed them, and they have done worse. They have armed felons. They have released felons from jail and told them to go out and kill people and earn your freedom that way.

I want at this moment, with the indulgence of the committee, to watch just a brief, 30-second video. It is captioned in English. It is from a member of the Maduro military who crossed the border, and I want you to read the caption of what he says were their orders as he crossed the border.

Senator RUBIO. I declare myself loyal to Juan Guaidó, President and Commander in Chief, Juan Guaidó. The government wants to massacre the people. The government wants to massacre the people. The orders are to kill the people, to release the colectivos "those are the armed gangs" and "release prisoners on the streets to attack the people."

That is not me saying it. That is not a U.S. politician saying it. That is a member of the armed forces of Venezuela saying it as he crossed the border. Their orders were to kill people.

In fact, at one point what he says, he uses the term "plomo," which means "lead." Their orders were to use lead bullets against the people. That is what it means. And they have only grown more brazen since that day.

For example, Univision reporter Jorge Ramos and his crew were detained, detained personally by Maduro, and their cameras seized, and to this day not returned, because they did not like the questions that they asked. They literally detained them, took their cameras, and have not released them to this day.

Just yesterday, another U.S. journalist, Cody Weddle, was arrested by the military intelligence services in an early morning raid and held for 12 hours, and then put on an airplane and sent back.

This is an effort to intimidate the press. This is an effort to send a message to the press: "You report on things we do not like, this is how we are going to treat you."

In the month of January alone, Maduro has detained 24 journalists, including the recent U.S. citizens detained for hours. I want to include a document in the record with the number of journalists that have been detained. They are from all over the world.

And without objection, I want to introduce that into the record. [The information referred to follows:]

DETENCIONES ARBITARIAS DE PERIODISTAS EN VENEZUELA



DETENCIONES ARBITARIAS DE PERIODISTAS EN VENEZUELA—CONTINUAR





Senator RUBIO. The OAS Secretary General has said, “The systematic attack against the civilian population in Venezuela includes murders, imprisonment, and torture, and it is evident in the eyes of the international community that we are in the presence of crimes against humanity.”

One of those civilians, who as of today has now spent 212 days in jail, is Juan Ju Cozens, a 29-year-old member of the National Assembly, the democratically elected National Assembly, basically their unicameral, democratically elected legislative body. He is also a former Venezuelan student leader. He was dragged out of his home by masked thugs for simply voicing his opposition against the regime. His sister, Raphaela, who my office has been in close touch with, and who is also a student leader in her own right, is here with us today, and I wanted to take this moment to recognize her, and I thank her for joining us here today. She does so at great danger and personal risk, but that is how important the cause is for her and for the people she represents.

Your presence, your voice in support of not just your brother but also the hundreds and thousands of political prisoners in Venezuela, is a testament to the suffering of the Venezuelan people and the injustice committed by the Maduro regime.

Maduro does not do any of this on his own. It is done with the help of three specific nefarious actors: the enslaved island of Cuba’s government, which has infiltrated all of their security forces and is in de facto control of the country—I am not exaggerating this; anyone who knows anything about this will tell you, Cuban agents are all through every level of that government; Russia, which continues to provide them with opportunity to evade sanctions and support them in international forums; and China, which goes around acting like they are the non-interference people but, in fact, are helping lead Maduro’s effort to block the Internet.

Among the tactics used by the regime—I have outlined it already—under the direction of Cuba, the armed gangs, known as the colectivos, these gangs have a presence in the Bolivar and Amazonas states, where the trafficking of illegal gold mining, as I said earlier, has devastated the environment and created unforeseen problems for the ailing economy. Picture number five, which is up here, is a picture of those armed gangs and how they use them in the streets of Venezuela.

It was these gangs, along with elements of the military, that on the 23rd of February carried out a massacre whose toll is still not fully known, a massacre of members of Venezuela's indigenous communities on the border with Brazil who are seeking to help get humanitarian aid into the country.

And that is our final picture, a picture of an injured Imona Indian, natives to the area, an indigenous community, who has been the subject of a massacre that history will write about and whose numbers we do not fully know. Unfortunately, that massacre has been largely ignored in the mainstream media outlets. As they open fire, the military and other irregular forces open fire on them and prevent the delivery of aid from the Brazilian border.

But fortunately, the world is waking up to the true nature of this crisis. Fifty-four nations, not the United States alone, 54 nations, the vast majority of the nations of this hemisphere, including under the leadership of the Lima Group, which the United States is not even a member of but involves all the most important regional partners that we have, have recognized Juan Guaidó as the legitimate interim president of Venezuela.

Last week, the United States introduced a resolution at the U.N. Security Council supporting Interim President Juan Guaidó and calling for free and fair elections. It was supported by a majority of the members of the Security Council. You can, of course, guess who vetoed it: China and Russia.

Before I close, I want to recognize and thank the many, many Venezuelans, both in the U.S. and from abroad, who are here with us today. I know there are many that have traveled from my home state of Florida and many other parts of the United States, and I want to applaud your perseverance and your fight in this cause, and I would close with this message here in the room and to those watching elsewhere, especially those in Venezuela: Your fight for freedom and restoration of democracy is our fight, and the free world has not and will not forget you.

Maduro's regime believes that he can wait us out. That has been his strategy all along: hold on, wait it out, the world will lose focus, they will stop paying attention, they will move on to other things, and the opposition will fracture.

We are not going to forget about it. We are not going to lose attention. We will be on this as long as it takes and no matter how hard it is. It is in our national interest. It does honor to our legacy as a nation that believes in the dignity and human rights of all people, and it is something that we are strongly committed to, as I hope you will take away from today's hearing. There may be debates about tactics, but there is no debate, I believe, no real disagreement among our parties here in the United States that the people of Venezuela deserve far better than to be in the grips of a criminal organization, as they are today.

With that, I want to introduce the ranking member, Senator Cardin.

I know also that the ranking member of the full committee is here and has been very engaged, and I would open up to him, however you want to handle that.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BEN CARDIN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, on behalf of the Democratic members, I want to congratulate you on your chairmanship of this subcommittee. I look forward to working with you.

I very much appreciate that the very first hearing of our subcommittee is on Venezuela. Your comments, particularly your closing comments, I believe represent the consensus of both parties here on this committee, and that is that the Maduro regime has no legitimacy and that the Venezuelan people deserve a democratic government, a government that will protect their human rights.

So I think this is the right hearing for us to start, and I look forward to working with you.

I also appreciate the fact that you acknowledged Senator Menendez, the ranking member of the full committee, and when I complete my opening comments, I would ask that he be recognized for an opening statement.

Senator Menendez has been our leader in this hemisphere. He has been our leader now globally, but he has been our leader in this hemisphere, and certainly his statements in regard to Venezuela echo and have been in the leadership of many of the statements that you have made in your opening statement.

And lastly, let me thank the witnesses for their patience. We are a little bit more lengthy in our opening comments. I hope the Chairman will be tolerant of the clock today, because I do think the seriousness of the subject, the timeliness of the subject, and the importance of us working with the Trump Administration to help the people of Venezuela could not be more urgent. So I very much appreciate the importance of this subject.

The Venezuelan people have suffered the consequences of this tragic manmade humanitarian and human rights crisis for far too long. Through their enduring resilience and perseverance, they have now had an historic opportunity to restore democracy, prosperity, and the rule of law to their country.

Mr. Chairman, I wholeheartedly agree with your assessment of the staggering corruption, mismanagement, authoritarianism, and criminality used by the Maduro regime and his loyalists to oppress the people of Venezuela. Decades of slow erosion of democratic norms and human rights, along with the selfish motivations of a dictator, have precipitated this crisis.

It is tragic that the Maduro regime would rather feed their own greed than allow millions of hungry Venezuelan children and families to access the food and humanitarian aid they desperately need.

As you pointed out, the loss of body weight of the average Venezuelan is shocking, 24 pounds according to a study done in 2017. It is called the Maduro diet. So while Maduro's inner circle enrich themselves with billions of dollars of ill-gotten funds, the Venezuelan people lack basic necessities. They live in fear of being killed, robbed, or kidnapped by criminal groups which operate with impunity, and even outright government approval, as you pointed out in your opening statement.

Today, Caracas has the sad distinction of being the world's most dangerous city.

Under these dire circumstances, the Venezuelans are fleeing their country in record numbers. An estimated 3 million have fled over the past five years, resulting in a refugee crisis unprecedented in this hemisphere. Our Latin American neighbors have given refuge to millions of fleeing Venezuelans, and I applaud their efforts. It has been extremely challenging for the surrounding countries. I had a chance to talk to Administrator Green about this yesterday, and it is incredible what the surrounding countries are doing in order to meet these needs.

I am aware, Mr. Chairman, that your home State of Florida has also received fleeing Venezuelans. The crisis hits close to home for many of my constituents in Maryland, as well. This is truly a regional crisis affecting the entire hemisphere, as you pointed out.

For all these reasons, both moral and practical, the crisis in Venezuela commands our attention. I support the U.S. and OAS and other donor efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, including Venezuelans who have fled their country. As I talked with Administrator Green yesterday, we can get access with regards to those that are outside of Venezuela, but within Venezuela it is much, much more difficult.

I similarly support the use of economic tools like Global Magnitsky sanctions to target the Maduro regime's worst offenders. Targeted sanctions provide accountability and prevent criminals in the regime from using the banking system to hide their stolen assets. They do not want to keep their assets in Venezuela. They would like to be able to do that globally, and we can prevent that.

I call on our partners to consider imposing their own Magnitsky-like sanctions on the Maduro regime to amplify the impact of the sanctions. Regime officials should not be allowed to hide the proceeds of their corruption overseas and send their family members to live abroad in luxury while their country starves.

As we are well aware, there are also clear steps that the Maduro regime can take to get themselves de-listed from sanctions. Those currently keeping this illegitimate government in power and blocking aid from entering their country should know it is not too late to do the right thing.

Our partners and allies in Latin America and worldwide have formed a powerful chorus calling for a peaceful return to democracy in Venezuela. More than 50 countries have joined us in recognizing the legitimacy of the Guaidó government. I hope that others will continue to do so.

The United States, along with our global partners, can help the interim government resolve the crisis peacefully so that the Venezuelan people can finally fully reclaim their country.

I really do appreciate the witnesses that are here today. I really look forward to Mr. Abrams and Administrator Green. We thank you for your long service to our country and your continued service to our country.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to yield to the ranking member of the full committee, Senator Menendez.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Menendez?

**STATEMENT OF HON. BOB MENENDEZ,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, let me start off by commending Senator Rubio, Chairman Rubio, and Senator Cardin for convening today's hearing. I think it is a critically important time to be talking about the Western Hemisphere. Nothing rises, in my mind, higher at this moment than Venezuela, and, of course, following that, Nicaragua, as well.

And thank you, Administrator Green and Special Envoy Abrams, for being with us today.

I think the one thing we should walk away from this hearing with today is that Democrats and Republicans are united as one on behalf of the people of Venezuela, on recognizing Interim President Juan Guaidó as the legitimate interim president of Venezuela, and in our pursuit of democracy and human rights for the Venezuelan people.

Venezuela is at a crossroads, one in which a dictator clings to power amidst the ruins of a failed state, and one in which democratic actors seek a peaceful transition and the reconstruction of their country and their society.

The Maduro regime has inflicted widespread suffering on the Venezuelan people—I think the Chairman made his opening remarks very extensive on this question—from a manmade humanitarian crisis, to an economy in freefall, to the violence perpetrated by security forces, colectivos, and the regime's death squads.

Maduro is a criminal dictator who has destroyed a country. His election and inauguration are illegitimate—not because we say it, but because the world says it—and his grip on power comes only from the oppression of his people, the assets he has stolen from them, and the military leaders he has paid for their loyalty.

The fact that he is closely advised by Cuba and bankrolled by Russia and China only complicates matters.

There is, however, a democratic process by which members of the legitimately-elected National Assembly exercised their power under the Venezuelan constitution to designate Assembly President Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela.

Embracing this process to restore democracy in Venezuela, it was critically important that more than 50 countries recognized Guaidó as the interim president.

This unprecedented coalition spans our hemisphere and the world, from Canada, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, and Brazil to the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany, and Japan, to mention a few.

I strongly support the Administration's decision to recognize Guaidó, as well as its efforts to expand sanctions against specific individuals, and to work with regional partners to deliver much needed humanitarian aid. And I believe firmly in the full use of U.S. political and economic pressure to create the conditions necessary for a negotiated solution that includes Maduro's departure and Venezuela's peaceful return to democracy.

So we must ask: Where do we go from here? As the Guaidó government works to restore democracy, the global community must not waver in our support for the Venezuelan people.

In 2014, when I was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we passed the first set of sanctions and efforts to restore democracy to Venezuela. Last week I authored bipartisan legislation to extend Temporary Protected Status to Venezuelans in the United States, and in the coming weeks I plan to introduce comprehensive legislation aimed at pressuring the Maduro regime further and helping the Venezuelan people rebuild their country.

My legislation will expand humanitarian assistance. My bill includes provisions to increase pressure on the regime, but it will also send a message particularly to the military inside of Venezuela and to regime officials: If you want a future in Venezuela, and if you want a future free of U.S. sanctions that will follow you anywhere in the world, then you must recognize the legitimate interim president, Juan Guaidó, and you must not have blood on your hands. You must not have blood on your hands.

However, for our economic and financial sanctions to be truly effective, they must be matched by actions from our allies. We must, by example, encourage our partners to make similar investments.

During my travel to Europe for the Munich Security Conference last month, I took every opportunity to raise Venezuela with European leaders, stressing the importance of coordinating our humanitarian and our sanctions efforts, and the interim president's push to organize new democratic elections.

What I would caution is that the support that we have lent unequivocally to Venezuela does not include the use of force. These comments threaten the international consensus that has created an opening for positive change and a return to democracy.

Despite our collective hopes, the events of the last several weeks did not lead to the quick win that the Administration seemed to expect. As we have learned throughout our history as a nation, confronting tyranny requires sustained commitment.

It is increasingly clear that the struggle for democracy and freedom in Venezuela is going to take some time, discipline, and a strategy based on a keen understanding of the complex situation on the ground.

But Maduro is not invincible; he's far from it. Since January 23rd, more than 500 soldiers and several high-ranking regime officials have defected, including two generals and the former head of the intelligence service. Moreover, President Guaidó further exposed Maduro's weakness by returning to Venezuela on Monday, doing so not by sneaking across the border but by landing at Caracas airport.

We have a unique opportunity before us.

So, in closing, I know that I have heard that the Administration has a Plan A, B, C, and D. I look forward to hearing what those are at this hearing so that we can understand how we can strategize together, coordinate together, to achieve the ultimate goal of the freedom of the Venezuelan people and the opportunity to restore democracy in Venezuela, and to make it once again a nation among the family of hemispheric nations that observes the rule of law, democracy, and has the respect of its people's rights.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
 Senator RUBIO. Thank you.
 We will begin with our witnesses.
 Mr. Abrams?

STATEMENT OF THE HON. ELLIOTT ABRAMS, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR VENEZUELA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Chairman Rubio and Ranking Member Cardin, and Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Menendez, members of the committee. Thanks for the opportunity to testify here.

We are witnessing in Venezuela one of the worst humanitarian disasters ever in our hemisphere, as you have said, and the largest displacement of people in Latin American history. Well over 3 million Venezuelans have fled to neighboring countries.

This crisis is, as has been noted, all manmade by a small and venal group acting without the slightest concern for the people of Venezuela.

The Venezuelan people have the commitment of the United States Government to work with them as they restore their democracy and rebuild the prosperity of their nation.

First, we will keep putting the pressure on Nicolás Maduro. We are putting an end to his regime's use of PDVSA as a source of vast corruption. We have implemented sanctions that are cutting off vital sources of cash to this corrupt regime's pockets. We are applying the full weight of individual sanctions on Maduro's supporters, and are revoking their own and their families' visas. We are working with the international community to freeze the regime's bank accounts across the globe.

We are also making it clear that it is never too late to change. We will provide off-ramps to those who will support democratic change in Venezuela and do what is right for the Venezuelan people.

We have at the same time answered Interim President Guaidó's call for humanitarian help. I am sure the Administrator will have more to say about that. But the total of the United States' support is just now short of \$200 million. We have stocked warehouses in Cucuta, Colombia full of food and basic medicines at the border and are seeking ways of bringing those supplies into Venezuela and having them distributed to people in need.

Maduro and his cronies, and some of their cheerleaders abroad, claim that delivering humanitarian assistance is a political show and a cover for military intervention and a violation of Venezuela's sovereignty. But let's be clear: only the Maduro regime is using violence. Only the regime is shooting at unarmed protesters and aid workers. Only the regime has betrayed Venezuelan independence and sovereignty by submitting to Cuban influence in Venezuela's military, security, and intelligence agencies, as Chairman Rubio noted. Only the regime uses food and medicine as a political tool for social control. Their repeated mention of military intervention is simply a ploy designed to divide the broad, unified international coalition of now 54 countries supporting democracy in Venezuela.

It is becoming clear that the great majority of the armed forces and the National Guard do not want to carry out the Maduro regime's shameful orders. The use of armed gangs suggests that Maduro has real doubts about the loyalty of the Venezuelan military.

For those members of the armed forces who are still on the fence, fearing retaliation by Maduro's Cuban accomplices, we are asking them to show their pride and patriotism, and we believe they have a key role to play in rebuilding their homeland.

Interim President Guaidó and the political parties in Venezuela's legitimate National Assembly have all stated that the transition to a new post-Maduro Venezuela will be a multi-party, inclusive process. It will include Chavistas and others of every political background who see a democratic future for Venezuela, led by the Venezuelan people, not a Venezuelan dictator and a small corrupt crew.

We are grateful for the leadership of our partners in supporting humanitarian assistance for the people of Venezuela, and supporting their demand for democracy. We are witnessing an historic shift in this hemisphere toward solidarity and shared interests, and with 54 countries that have now recognized Guaidó as interim president, we can be proud that we have helped galvanize the effort to restore democracy and liberty to Venezuela.

Each day, courageous Venezuelan patriots struggle to make Venezuela free, often at their own real peril, and Interim President Guaidó has injected a new energy into the collective hope of those who want to return to a Venezuela that benefits all Venezuelan citizens, not just Maduro and the inner circle.

So, Mr. Chairman, we stand united behind the Venezuelan people. Like the vast majority of Venezuelans, we believe the time to end Maduro's wholesale destruction of Venezuela is now. And when Venezuelans succeed in ending the dictatorship and restoring liberty, it will show despots and dictators not only in our hemisphere but in the rest of the world that people's desire for freedom cannot be extinguished.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, Ranking Member Cardin, Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, for having me here today. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Administration's approach to Venezuela. I thank all of you for your interest in one of the most pressing foreign policy issues before us. We are witnessing one of the worst humanitarian disasters ever in our hemisphere. And it is all man-made, by a small and venal group acting without the slightest concern for the people of Venezuela.

On February 23, the world witnessed disgraced former president of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro and his wife joyfully dance after his criminal gangs murdered more than 25 people, injured more than 80 others, and set fire to and destroyed humanitarian assistance that could have fed hungry children, provided medicines to the sick, and saved lives. His henchmen, like Freddy Bernal, released prisoners from jail and paid them—along with terrorists groups like the ELN—to shoot, harass, and intimidate indigenous people and aid workers who only wanted to bring long-awaited relief to Venezuelans. And the effects of Venezuela's crisis are not limited to its own borders. We are witnessing the largest displacement of people in Latin

American history. Well over three million Venezuelans have fled to neighboring countries.

In short, while his own people starve and bleed, the Maduro regime celebrates.

Every day that goes by, the suffering of the Venezuelan people grows. But every day, we also see Maduro grow weaker and that's why the Venezuelan people should not lose hope. We now know Maduro can no longer depend on the loyalty of those around him. He may dress up his thugs in military and National Guard uniforms to make it appear he has support, but his use of armed gangs suggests his real doubts about the loyalty of the Venezuelan military. Maduro's back is up against the wall. Surrounding him on all sides, he has people who despise him—people just waiting for the right moment to show him the door.

It's becoming clearer that the vast majority of the Armed Forces and National Guard do not want to carry out Maduro's shameful orders. For those members of the armed forces who are still on the fence, fearing retaliation by Maduro's Cuban accomplices, we have told them that now is the time to take a stand because Maduro is waging war against his own people. We are asking them to show their pride and patriotism by lifting their own people out of this crisis. Their people need them now more than ever and they have a key role to play in rebuilding their homeland. Interim President Juan Guaidó, his representative in the United States Ambassador Carlos Vecchio, political parties in Venezuela's legitimate National Assembly, and the National Assembly's economic recovery planners have all stated that the transition to a new, post-Maduro Venezuela will be a multi-party, inclusive process. It will also include chavistas and others of every socio-economic background who see a democratic future for Venezuela, led by the Venezuelan people—not a Venezuelan dictator and a small, corrupt crew.

In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, the Venezuelan people have the commitment of the United States government to work with them as they restore their democracy, restore a proper respect for human rights, and rebuild the prosperity of their nation.

First, we will keep building the pressure on Nicolás Maduro. We are putting an end to his regime's pillaging of PDVSA, once called the "crown jewel of the people," as a source of vast corruption. We have implemented sanctions that are cutting off vital sources of cash to this corrupt regime's pockets. Customers for Venezuela's oil are dwindling, reducing the regime's ability to sustain itself and enrich insiders. We are also working with the international community to freeze the regime's bank accounts across the globe. We are revoking their own and their families' visas and we are applying the full weight of individual sanctions on Maduro's supporters.

We are also making it clear that it is never too late to change. Off-ramps are available to those who concretely support democratic change in Venezuela and do what is right for the Venezuelan people.

At the same time, we have answered interim President Guaidó's call for humanitarian help. Vice President Pence's February 25 announcement of nearly \$56 million in additional humanitarian assistance to support the regional response to the Venezuela crisis brings the total United States government response to more than \$195 million, including more than \$152 million in humanitarian assistance and approximately \$43 million in development and economic assistance. On January 24, Secretary Pompeo announced the United States is ready to provide more than \$20 million in initial humanitarian assistance to the people inside Venezuela. We have stocked warehouses full of food and basic medicine at the border crossing of Cucuta, Colombia, and are seeking ways to bring these supplies into Venezuela and have them distributed to people in need.

Maduro and his cronies, and some of his cheerleaders abroad, claim that delivering humanitarian assistance is a political show—a cover for a military intervention and a violation of Venezuela's sovereignty. But let me be very clear: only the Maduro regime is using violence. Only the regime is shooting at and killing unarmed protestors and aid workers. Only the regime has betrayed Venezuelan independence and sovereignty by submitting to Cuban influence in Venezuela's military, security, and intelligence. Only the regime uses food and medicines as political tools for social control. Their repeated mention of U.S. military intervention is simply a ploy designed to divide the broad, unified international coalition of 54 countries supporting democracy in Venezuela.

We are grateful for the leadership of our partners in supporting humanitarian assistance for the people of Venezuela and supporting their demand for democracy. The European Union, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Peru, all swiftly condemned the use of violence and called for the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance. Their words, and their actions, are making a real difference in this crisis. As a result, we are witnessing a historic shift in our hemisphere toward solidarity and shared interests—recognizing we are stronger together. With 54 countries that have now recognized Guaidó as in-

terim president, we can be proud that we have helped galvanize a global effort to restore democracy and liberty in Venezuela.

Although Maduro's dictatorial actions have cost lives and inflicted great pain and suffering, we are witnessing a massive outpouring of hope, courage, and tenacity by the Venezuelan people. They are openly condemning a regime that has brought them nothing but sadness, anger, and misery. The protests of 2017 were significant. What we are seeing today should humble and inspire us all: Venezuelans from all walks of life united in an enduring struggle to end this nightmare. Each day, courageous Venezuelan patriots struggle to make Venezuela free, often at their own peril. They are bringing change to Venezuela through their bravery. And over the last few weeks, they have been heard. Interim President Juan Guaidó has injected new energy into the collective hope of those who want to return to a Venezuela that benefits all Venezuelan citizens, not just Maduro and his inner circle.

The United States stands behind Interim President Guaidó 100 percent. More importantly, Mr. Chairman, we stand united behind the Venezuelan people. We will not abandon them in this difficult moment. Like the vast majority of Venezuelans, we believe that the time to end Maduro's wholesale destruction of Venezuela is now. And when Venezuelans succeed in ending the dictatorship and restoring liberty, it will show despots and dictators not only in our hemisphere, but in the rest of the world, that the people's desire for freedom cannot be extinguished.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee. I look forward to answering any questions you have.

Senator RUBIO. Administrator Green?

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MARK GREEN, ADMINISTRATOR,
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASH-
INGTON, DC**

Mr. GREEN. Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Menendez, Chairman Rubio and Ranking Member Cardin, members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the ongoing crisis in Venezuela, and thanks to all of you on both sides of the aisle for your leadership on this very important topic.

One of our challenges this morning may be that we are running out of terms to adequately capture the level of suffering that Venezuelan families are facing each and every day. Hyper-inflation, by some estimates approaching 2 million percent, and rampant food shortages have wrecked the ability of countless families to make ends meet. According to the Venezuelan Society of Pediatrics and Childcare, 80 percent of children under 5 are in some stage of malnutrition. Nearly 90 percent of hospitals are experiencing medicine shortages, and almost as many are without reliable power or water.

Infectious diseases previously eliminated or controlled are now surging. A diphtheria outbreak that began in July 2016 has now escalated to nearly 1,560 cases, including 270 deaths. All of this affects the larger region. Of the roughly 17,000 measles cases recently diagnosed in the region, most have been traced to outbreaks inside Venezuela.

Well over 3 million Venezuelans have already fled into neighboring countries, and, as was stated, this is the largest cross-border exodus in the history of the Americas. Of course, the crisis is all the more outrageous because it is entirely manmade and regime driven. From government takeover of huge sectors of the economy to rampant kleptocracy, from destroying governing checks and balances and civil rights to forcing doctors and other professionals to flee, the regime has caused a once-prosperous nation to essentially implode.

As if all of this were not enough, Maduro saves some of his worst for his treatment of humanitarian assistance. For one thing, he

heartlessly continues to claim, in the face of all of the suffering and sorrow, that there is no crisis, that his government is already fully providing for the Venezuelan people. As recently as 2016, he claimed the country's health care system was among the best in the world. Far worse, his regime often uses his country's plight to increase his hold on power. He has regularly manipulated social assistance programs to reward supporters, enrich cronies, and influence votes. Credible reports show he has skimmed millions from social welfare programs, and there is evidence that he has used identification cards in ways that tied food assistance to votes and political support for the regime.

Needless to say, USAID does not view the Maduro regime, or the networks it controls, as an appropriate means for delivering relief. However, the good news is that we actually see rays of hope for both a real humanitarian partnership and a more democratic, prosperous future in Venezuela. That good news is the emergence of Juan Guaidó as interim president, officially recognized by the U.S. and more than 50 other countries.

I have recently spoken with Interim President Guaidó and his representatives, both by phone and in person. They thanked us for USAID's support for democracy in Venezuela, and that should be particularly gratifying to all of you because of the democracy assistance programs for Venezuela that you have invested in over these last five years on a bipartisan basis. This assistance has supported local organizations working on human rights, civil society, independent media, electoral oversight, and the democratically elected National Assembly.

Guaidó's team has also requested our assistance to begin addressing some of the urgent needs of everyday Venezuelans. USAID, with support from the Departments of Defense and State and others, has responded.

First, we are continuing to provide support to the surrounding region in the form of urgently needed food, health care, protection, and shelter to both Venezuelans and host communities. Over the last two years our assistance has totaled more than \$195 million.

Second, now that we have a leader with whom we can partner, we have taken steps to pre-position humanitarian assistance close to the border for eventual delivery into Venezuela. Since February 4th, the U.S. Government has pre-positioned more than 525 metric tons of urgently needed humanitarian assistance, food aid, emergency medical items, hygiene kits, water treatment units, and nutrition products. In fact, this very day, Deputy Administrator Bonnie Glick is accompanying our latest shipment of humanitarian assistance and medical supplies aimed at helping hospitals and clinics to Cucuta.

The U.S. Government is hardly alone. A dozen-plus countries have made concrete pledges, and five, including the U.S., have already taken steps to pre-position assistance. In addition, we know that private-sector sources are also attempting to respond to Guaidó's request.

As you are no doubt aware, on February 23rd, Interim President Guaidó and courageous Venezuelan volunteers attempted to bring some supplies from the international community, including some

from USAID, across the border. Unfortunately, they were confronted by security forces alongside colectivos.

It is clear that the Venezuelan people will not be deterred by Maduro's brutality or cowardice, and neither will the U.S. Government. We will continue to support Interim President Guaidó's efforts to deliver aid to his people in Venezuela, and we will continue to support Colombia and others that are hosting Venezuelans who have fled.

We all recognize that humanitarian assistance, however badly it is needed, is treatment, not cure. It cannot address the root cause of the problem. So long as Maduro and his cronies continue to crush the people, their economy, and their hope, this crisis will worsen. They deserve a return to democracy, rule of law, and citizen-responsive governance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of you for your support. With that continued support, we will continue in our efforts to support the people of Venezuela, the interim president, to restore democracy and prosperity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Green follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARK GREEN

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the situation in Venezuela and our work to support those affected by the crisis.

For years, Members of this Subcommittee have called attention to the corruption, economic mismanagement, and oppression that are the hallmarks of the former, illegitimate Maduro regime, and I appreciate your continued leadership on this issue. In particular, I would like to thank Chairman Rubio for his leadership. I appreciated our recent time together in Colombia, where we saw firsthand some of the effects of the crisis, as well as aspects of our response efforts. I would also like to thank Ranking Member Cardin for sustained focus on assisting the Venezuelan people, including the legislation he introduced in the last Congress. Your ongoing support and input is critical to our work.

It will come as no surprise to the Members of this Subcommittee that the situation in Venezuela is severe and continues to deteriorate. In fact, one of our great challenges is finding words to adequately convey the suffering that Venezuelan families feel each and every day. Hyperinflation and food scarcity have driven the monthly cost to feed a family to 100 times the monthly minimum wage. Crumbling infrastructure has disrupted water and sanitation services. Nearly 90 percent of Venezuelan hospitals are experiencing medicine shortages, and almost as many are without reliable power or water. No longer able to meet their basic needs, almost 3.5 million Venezuelans have fled to neighboring countries and beyond, creating the largest cross-border exodus in the history of the Americas; the effects of this crisis extend well beyond the country's borders.

The collapsing health care infrastructure in Venezuela has led to surges of infectious diseases within the country and, increasingly, throughout the region. This includes diseases that had previously been eliminated or controlled. An outbreak of diphtheria that began in July 2016 has escalated to nearly 1,560 cases as of January 2019, resulting in 270 deaths. Dengue has taken its toll as well, with more than 2,400 confirmed cases in 2018.

Again, the effects of these outbreaks are not limited to the country itself. In 2016, 86 percent of malaria cases in one Brazilian municipality were attributed to Venezuelan immigration. The majority of the approximately 17,000 measles cases throughout the region have been traced to outbreaks inside Venezuela. Recently, nearly 50 epidemiological specialists urged health-care authorities to declare a region-wide public health emergency due to ongoing disease outbreaks, stemming from Venezuela—malaria, measles, Chagas disease, leishmaniasis, Zika virus, and dengue virus were all cited.

Of course, mere numbers fall short of telling the full story. Two weeks ago, I visited Cúcuta, Colombia, a short distance from the Venezuela border. There, I saw firsthand the human toll of the illegitimate Maduro regime's disastrous policies and actions. Speaking with the Venezuelans who had managed to reach this city, I heard

accounts of children starving, hospitals running out of medicine, and people forced to walk hundreds of miles over several days to cross the border in search of help. One young mother, with tears streaming down her face, told me how she had to leave her 7-year-old child behind when she fled. As I know you all agree, the horror of the situation is all the more painful because Venezuela was once one of the region's wealthiest countries.

The United States has a long, proud tradition of standing with people and countries in their time of need, and acting when it can to save lives and alleviate human suffering. It is who we are as Americans. Of course, that principle is especially important when it comes to crises in our own hemisphere, because our national security interests are also at stake.

Again, this crisis is entirely man-made and regime-driven. Rather than save lives, Maduro's sole objective is quite clearly holding on to his own power—regardless of the misery it causes. As a consequence, humanitarian assistance from the U.S. and elsewhere cannot be entrusted to his control and networks of distribution. Remember, to this day, Maduro claims there is no crisis in Venezuela—that the government is already adequately providing for its people. At the same time, his illegitimate regime is heartlessly using food and other life-sustaining supplies as tools to further oppress and control the lives of individuals. For example, according to industry sources, Maduro controls 100 percent of bakery flour inside the country. His regime decides who receives flour and how much. Much of the time, this basic necessity is made available only to Maduro's key supporters and allies.

But, for the first time in some years, there are real rays of hope. The U.S. and other leading democracies rejected the results of last May's illegitimate elections. We have repeatedly recognized the National Assembly as the only legitimate government body, duly elected by the Venezuelan people. And on January 23, 2019, we became the first country to officially recognize Juan Guaidó as the Interim President of Venezuela under the country's constitution. Interim President Guaidó's leadership has provided new inspiration for everyday Venezuelans to continue bravely resisting Maduro's tyranny, despite the very real risks posed by their courage.

I myself spoke with Interim President Guaidó on January 30, 2019. During that call, I reaffirmed the United States commitment to continue supporting the Venezuelan National Assembly, as well as other key democratic actors, such as local civil society organizations and the independent media. We agreed to work together to help restore dignity, human rights, and democracy in Venezuela. Interim President Guaidó also requested our assistance in helping him begin to meet some of the urgent needs of his people.

In response to his request, USAID and the Department of State—with support from the Departments of Defense and others—has pre-positioned humanitarian assistance in Colombia close to the border for eventual delivery into Venezuela. The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration simultaneously staged assistance in Brazil. All told, since February 4, the U.S. Government has pre-positioned more than 400 metric tons of urgently needed humanitarian assistance, including food aid, emergency medical items, hygiene kits, water treatment units, and nutrition products, on Venezuela's two longest borders.

At President Trump's instruction, we have closely coordinated these efforts with the international community. President Iván Duque of Colombia and President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, in particular, have been key allies in our efforts. I was honored to join Vice President Pence at his February 25 meeting with members of the Lima Group in Bogota, Colombia. The U.S. is grateful for our allies in the region who have stepped up to help the Venezuelan people in their hour of need.

As you are no doubt aware, on February 23, 2019, Interim President Guaidó and courageous Venezuelan volunteers attempted to bring these supplies and other assistance from the international community across the border. Unfortunately, they were confronted by more evidence of the illegitimate Maduro regime's callous disregard for the Venezuelan people. Maduro's security forces, alongside colectivos—armed gangs under Maduro's control—blocked trucks carrying life-saving assistance. They fired tear gas, rubber bullets, and set vehicles on fire. Members of Venezuela's Pemon indigenous group had peacefully organized the transport of supplies from Brazil, but they were viciously attacked by regime security forces. There are reports that Maduro deliberately released convicts from prison, entreating them to join the violence. Several members of the Pemon community were killed, among dozens of fellow Venezuelans who were wounded by gunshot in an attempt to bring in assistance that Venezuela so desperately needs. It was a shocking display of brutality, but par for the course for Maduro and his thugs.

It's clear that the Venezuelan people will not be deterred by Maduro's brutality or cowardice—and neither will the U.S. Government. We will continue to support Interim President Guaidó's efforts to deliver aid to his people in Venezuela, and we

will continue to support Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, and others that are hosting Venezuelans who have fled. To date, the U.S. has provided more than \$195 million, including more than \$152 million in humanitarian assistance and approximately \$43 million in development and economic assistance, to aid those Venezuelans who have left the country. That funding has supported the provision of urgently needed food, health care, protection, and shelter, to both Venezuelans and host communities. We are not alone in this effort. Many of our close allies have pledged support, and many private citizens have already contributed assistance to the region, as well.

We all realize that humanitarian assistance, no matter how badly it is needed, is treatment, not a cure. It cannot address the root cause of the problem. So long as Maduro and his cronies continue to crush the people of Venezuela, their economy, and their hope, this crisis will worsen. As in Cuba, Nicaragua, and other places where people are suffering under authoritarianism, we know the answer to Venezuela's problem is human liberty and democracy, which remain the highest and best hope for people everywhere.

Venezuelans deserve a return to democracy, rule of law, and citizen-responsive governance. Despite the current turmoil, I am optimistic that a brighter day is ahead. The doomsayers talk as though freedom is in irreversible decline, but the only way freedom and democracy will fall away is if we let them. Interim President Guaidó, and the other Venezuelans I have spoken with during my travels throughout the region, are determined not to let that happen, and we are proud to stand with them in their struggle.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Subcommittee, we are witnessing a truly historic times for Venezuela and our hemisphere. As President Trump recently said in Miami, "the people of Venezuela stand at the threshold of history, ready to reclaim their country—and their future." With Congress' support, we at USAID will continue our efforts to support the Venezuelan people and help Interim President Juan Guaidó and the National Assembly restore democracy and prosperity to Venezuela.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

I am not going to use the full opening time. I have three quick questions, Mr. Abrams.

The first is, is it the policy of the United States to seek a peaceful solution and transition to democracy?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, it is.

Senator RUBIO. And you spend 100 percent of your time in search of a peaceful transition to democracy?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is correct.

Senator RUBIO. Second, the Maduro regime—well, let me ask you this. Yesterday, Ambassador Bolton put out a statement in which he put foreign financial institutions on notice that they will face sanctions for being involved in facilitating illegitimate transactions. What kind of sanctions are being contemplated?

Mr. ABRAMS. We have sanctioned a number of financial institutions already, and we are going to expand the net. We have under consideration other institutions which I will not name because we do not want them to get advance notice, but there will be more sanctions on financial institutions that are carrying out the orders of the Maduro regime to steal funds from Venezuela and hide it all around the world.

Senator RUBIO. And my final question is, Maduro's strategy is to wait us out. He thinks if he can wait long enough, we are going to get distracted and focus on something else, the opposition will fracture, and he will be able to hold on. It is the one way he has bought himself time. The other is four separate instances in which these negotiations, he used them basically to buy time.

Will Maduro wait out the United States, or is our commitment on this issue to be on it as long as it takes and no matter how hard it is?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is our commitment, and I think it is both a bipartisan commitment and one that the Congress and the Administration share.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. As we have all pointed out, there is strong bipartisan support for the Administration's policies as it relates to the recognition of the interim president, and the people of Venezuela, and the illegitimacy of the Maduro regime.

This is happening in our hemisphere. Three million people have left Venezuela.

Mr. Abrams, I take it that we are supporting the Colombia decision to have an open border so that those that are escaping the tragedy in Venezuela are being welcomed in Colombia.

Mr. ABRAMS. We are, and we are trying to provide some financial support for Colombia to help defray the very large expenses that they are undertaking.

Senator CARDIN. So, I want to ask you a direct question. We are judged not only by our words but also our actions, and we know that there are Venezuelans coming to our border. In previous times we have had open borders for those who are escaping persecution once they establish themselves as leaving an area where they are not safe. They can either use asylum, or we use Temporary Protected Status. We have done both. In some cases we have had very open policies, the Cubans who came to America.

What is the Administration's policy in regards to those who are coming to our border? Do you support their being welcomed here in the United States to seek asylum and that they could be protected under TPS status?

Mr. ABRAMS. We know that that is a great concern of yours and Senator Rubio's, who has introduced a bill on this with Mr. Menendez, and we have this policy actually under review right now.

I would say that there are 74,000 asylum applications right now from Venezuela.

Senator CARDIN. What is there to review? We all have pointed out the urgency of this situation. This is not a matter that can wait. So I am somewhat puzzled as to what there is to review.

Mr. ABRAMS. If one decides to move in that direction, there are a number of ways to do it—administratively, by TPS. So one of the things one has to decide is what exactly are you going to do once you decide to protect Venezuelans who are here. And as I say, there are 74,000 who are here who have applied for asylum, so they are, in a sense, being protected by the delays in that process. But they have come to the United States, and they are here, asking us to allow them to stay here.

Senator CARDIN. I would just point out that clarity here, to me, is extremely important. We are asking the region, countries in the region, to make extraordinary sacrifices in order to protect the lives of people. Our actions will be judged very much by what we do. When you say it is under consideration, that tells me that we are not acting in a timely way, and that presents to me a challenge for us and our leadership in that region.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, thank you, Senator. I will happily take this back to discuss with the Secretary. As you know, it is not only a

State Department issue. It is a DHS issue, as well. But we will move forward on that.

Senator CARDIN. You mentioned sanctions against financial institutions, and I strongly support what you are doing there. I want to get to individual sanctions, the use of Global Magnitsky or other sanction tools that we have available.

There needs to be a clear message to those who are part of the Maduro machinery, whether they are in the military or not in the military. Are we aggressively using individual sanctions to make it clear that people that are in power under Maduro have a choice: If they follow his leadership, they will be sanctioned, and we will maintain those sanctions and seek international support for those sanctions; but they have an opportunity to do what is right for the people of Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. We are. We have sanctioned dozens of regime officials. There will be more sanctions. There were about a half-dozen more a few days ago. There will be more. There are also visa revocations. I announced 49 last week. The Vice President announced 77 more for regime people and their families who we do not want in the United States.

Senator CARDIN. And have we made it clear that there is a path forward, that if they do what is right for the people of Venezuela—

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes. Every time we do this we note that these visa revocations, for example, and sanctions are all reversible.

Senator CARDIN. And, Administrator Green, I want to underscore a point that we talked about yesterday. Yes, we need to provide humanitarian aid to the 3 million, and we are doing that, and I appreciate that, working with our partners globally. We need to do everything we can to get humanitarian assistance into Venezuela, which is extremely challenging, and we need to do that.

We also have to recognize the regional impact, particularly in Colombia, which has over 1 million. There is a need there, but also as it affects our plans for Colombia; it is now impacted.

Can Colombia continue its peace process and integration of its communities and economic progress with the impact of the Venezuelans who have come to their country? Is that on your radar screen?

Mr. GREEN. Thank you for the question, and it absolutely is. You are right, the cost to the other countries in the region is not only the immediate humanitarian costs of assistance, but it affects their economic growth, it affects a number of things. So, yes, we are working with countries in the region, specifically and perhaps most of all with Colombia, to help them with a number of the other challenges that they are taking on.

Senator CARDIN. I would ask that, particularly in this budget cycle, that we be engaged on this, because it is going to be a challenge for Colombia to meet its goals in regards to their peace commitment. So we would welcome working with you as to the tools you need to help make that a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you.

Senator RUBIO. I just want to briefly recognize that we have been joined by Ambassador Vecchio, the legitimate ambassador to Ven-

ezuela, recently appointed by Interim President Guaidó and confirmed by the National Assembly. Thank you for joining us.

Senator BARRASSO?

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Green, we all strongly condemn the Maduro regime's violent attacks and murders of civilians seeking humanitarian aid in Venezuela. While the people of Venezuela are enduring a serious humanitarian crisis, Maduro is happy, it seems, to let the people of Venezuela suffer. He is denying food, denying medical care to his own people who are desperately in need of assistance. We know that stockpiles of life-saving assistance, including food and medicine and hygiene kits, are piling up at the border of Colombia and Brazil. The Chairman has been down to help in those efforts. So we strongly all urge Maduro to let humanitarian aid into Venezuela.

Could you talk a little bit about just how much, if any, of U.S. humanitarian assistance is actually reaching the Venezuelan people?

Mr. GREEN. Well, first off, of course, much assistance is reaching those who have fled, as we know, into the neighboring countries. In terms of those who have remained behind who are still in Venezuela, we know that there are private sources out there or individuals who are providing assistance and taking it across.

In terms of the assistance that we are all referring to that was pre-positioned in these recent weeks; tragically, on February 23rd, we all saw those events of the violent confrontation where the two trucks were set on fire. We just recently in the last few days did a complete inventory. The good news is the losses were relatively minor, so that assistance is being repositioned.

It really is up to the leadership of Interim President Guaidó. This assistance was pre-positioned at his request-specific requests from Guaidó to President Trump, Secretary Pompeo, and all of us. So we are working with him and following his lead.

Senator BARRASSO. Senator Cardin used the word "urgency," and we all have a sense of urgency. So if a political transition does not occur quickly and Maduro continues to prevent humanitarian assistance to his own people, could you talk about the likely impact on this humanitarian situation in Venezuela?

Mr. GREEN. I saw a statistic the other day that suggested that in the time that Maduro has been in power, the economy of Venezuela has contracted by 50 percent, and the estimate is that if things do not change it will contract another third this year. So we will see a profound collapse, and it is not even just the availability of food and staples. When you have inflation hitting, by some estimates, 2 million percent, nobody has the ability to buy anything anyway. So there will be profound despair and hopelessness.

But I will say this: my money continues to be on the Venezuelan people. I believe Maduro's days are numbered. I do not know what that number is, but when I was down there just last week, the remarkable energy and courage of the Venezuelan people tells me that this will eventually end the right way.

Senator BARRASSO. Mr. Abrams, I see you shaking your head yes about the length of the ability of the Maduro regime to stay in place. The world saw the Assad regime remain in power as a direct

result of being propped up by outside countries, such as the military and the financial backing from Russia and from Iran. These countries were willing to support a ruthless dictator who was willing to brutally murder his own people and destroy his own country.

As you look at the Maduro regime's frantic attempts going on right now to remain in power, what countries do you see attempting to help keep him in power against the people?

Mr. ABRAMS. The two critical supports, as Senator Rubio said, are Russia and Cuba. There are thousands and thousands of Cuban military and intel people all around Maduro. They permeate the regime. Russia has supplied tens of billions of dollars. As soon as we did the pedevsa sanctions, Maduro turned to Russia to purchase more oil to sell what they need to be able to continue exporting oil. So those are the two countries that are really propping up the regime most.

Senator BARRASSO. And then the final question, because Ambassador Green talked about the economy constricted by 50 percent and another 50 percent coming in terms of the future, Mr. Abrams, what economic reforms need to occur into the next administration in order to reverse the destruction of the Maduro regime that he has unleashed on this Venezuelan economy? What can people do once he is gone?

Mr. ABRAMS. There are a number of plans. There is a thing called Plan Puesta that the National Assembly has. Our own embassy has worked on a plan. And there will be, I should say, unquestionably, World Bank and IMF plans that will involve billions of dollars in funds to reconstruct the economy of Venezuela.

The great thing in this case is that this is not fundamentally a bankrupt country. It is a country with this incredible resource of petroleum, the greatest in the world.

So I think you will find that with a change of leadership and a change of economic policy, that there will be lots of people who are ready to invest, and I think the World Bank and the IMF in particular will be ready to help start that engine.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GREEN. Mr. Chairman, may I just add a comment onto my friend's response?

I think the other aspect of this that makes Venezuela different than some of the other challenges that we take on: the Venezuela diaspora are talented, educated, absolutely devoted to Venezuela. When they return home, and I believe that they will, they will provide a surge of energy into that economy that will greatly mobilize the rebuilding. This is a wonderful—there is a generation of leaders who are just waiting for the day. I think as we partner with them, we will see great results.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Menendez?

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me thank my colleagues on the subcommittee for allowing me to go first.

I just want to remark that it is rare that the Chairman and Ranking of the full committee and the attendance on both sides of the aisle that exists as this hearing takes place—I have been around here for a while. I have seen many hearings. Sometimes it

is sparse, particularly when it relates to Latin America. I think it speaks volumes about the interest on a bipartisan basis of Congress on this particular issue.

I want to pick up a moment on what Administrator Green said. The Venezuelan diaspora is fantastic, incredible, all the more reason we should give them TPS so that they are focused not on the concern that they may be deported to a country while Maduro is there where their lives are risked but focus on how they build a future for Venezuela. I think that speaks for another policy reason why Temporary Protected Status is eminently a good policy.

Mr. ABRAMS, I understand from media reports that you have had at least two rounds of secret talks with Maduro's foreign minister, Jorge Ariaza. I am not going to ask you about the substance in this setting, but can you confirm that these talks took place?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes. They were supposed to be confidential, but—
[Laughter.]

Senator MENENDEZ. As so many other things in Washington are supposed to be.

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.
[Laughter.]

Senator MENENDEZ. Are you and other Administration officials discussing Maduro's future with the Cuban regime?

Mr. ABRAMS. No.

Senator MENENDEZ. Have you personally, or have other members of the Administration, spoken to the Russian government?

Mr. ABRAMS. I have met with the Russian ambassador.

Senator MENENDEZ. How about the Chinese government?

Mr. ABRAMS. Not yet.

Senator MENENDEZ. OK. I think we need to be sending a very clear message: whatever investments you made in Maduro, you are not going to get them back under a failed state, at the end of the day. Your own interest, at the end of the day, is in allowing a democratic process to take place that can restore Venezuela to its full vitality, economically and otherwise, and I hope we are pushing that message, even with those who are working against us right now, and working against President Guaidó.

Mr. ABRAMS. We are, with our ambassadors, in both of those capitals.

Senator MENENDEZ. Can I get a commitment from you to come back sometime next week, or soon, to provide a classified briefing for the committee on this particular set of subjects?

Mr. ABRAMS. Absolutely.

Senator MENENDEZ. Secondly, I would like to see the Administration expand its efforts to coordinate sanctions, an issue that will be addressed in my pending legislation. Canada has designated dozens of officials for targeted sanctions. Europe has done some targeted designations and banned arms sales to the Maduro regime, and there are some initial efforts underway in Latin America for which I think we need to help our allies with capacity building and how to enforce sanctions.

But for our sanctions to have the greatest impact, as someone who has been the architect of many sanctions, other countries need to match our efforts, in this particular case with Venezuela debt, gold, crypto-currency, and oil.

What concrete steps are we taking to ensure our partners match our sanctions?

Mr. ABRAMS. This is really a diplomatic effort, and we have been in touch with all 24 of the countries in the EU that recognize Guaidó, and countries in Latin America that do as well, to try to get them, frankly, to do more sanctions, and to do more visa revocations. In many cases they have not done any. And there are, as you know, a number of officials in the Maduro regime who have sent their families abroad. So we have said to those countries, for example, why allow your country to be a playground for regime officials and their families? We are working on that.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I hope we will focus in those categories that I mentioned, because we just had a group of European parliamentarians here. They asked me about Venezuela. They were in concert with their countries in supporting President Guaidó, and I urged them that they should engage in the sanctions effort if they want to internationalize an effort to try to create a peaceful transition in Venezuela.

Now, Maduro and his cronies have stolen billions of dollars from the Venezuelan people. What steps is the Administration willing to take to return stolen assets to the Venezuelan people, separate from what we are doing with oil revenues? Should the U.S. or other international stakeholders contemplate setting up a fund to hold assets stolen from the Venezuelan people?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think that is a very good idea. The first step is to freeze it; that is, it will not be there if Maduro can get his hands on it. We have taken a lot of steps with government. We all know about the Bank of England freezing the gold. We have approached a lot of other governments. We approached several more yesterday, mentioning to those governments named banks and asking them to make sure that Venezuelan peoples assets are frozen so that they cannot be stolen by the regime.

Senator MENENDEZ. Something I intend to do in my legislation. I would love to work with the Administration to work on coordinating that.

Finally, Administrator Green, I understand we have provided approximately \$195 million in aid to Venezuela and hosting countries. Given that U.S. sanctions are denying the Maduro regime \$15 to \$25 million in export revenues per day, I think it is safe to say that the U.S. and the international community need to do more. I am contemplating in my legislation \$400 to \$500 million in humanitarian aid. Do you think that is a reasonable figure?

Mr. GREEN. I think it is a start, to be honest. In terms of what the humanitarian needs are, as you know, Venezuela in some ways is a black box. We have been working with IOM and others to begin to analyze and take a look at what that is, also taking a look at what the down payments are on such things as electoral support for free, fair, credible elections, and this is obviously something, as we know from the number of nations that have recognized Guaidó, that needs to be a multinational effort.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, since that is the case—two last points—why have we not convened a donors conference to bring about the preparations for what is necessary to deal with both the humanitarian disaster and then eventually the reconstruction? And

secondly, why do we not purchase goods from Colombia, for example? It is a two-way street. We will help the Venezuelans. We will also strengthen Colombia and help them as they are helping Venezuela and us in this effort. Is that not something that we should be pursuing?

Mr. GREEN. In the early days after my colleague was named, there was an informal donors conference. I agree with you, I think it is a good idea to have a broader, more formal donors conference. I think that is a great way not only of pulling together resources but making very clear that the world stands behind the future Venezuela, a democratic future.

And in terms of purchasing local, we are doing some of that, and I want to keep doing more of that. I agree with you in the way that you are characterizing it. First off, it is an effective and efficient way for us to get assistance more close to the target. But secondly, it does provide some economic support and stimulus for those communities near the Venezuelan border, and that, of course, is a good thing as well.

Mr. ABRAMS. Could I just add, Senator? There was on February 14th a conference at the OAS in which a number of particularly European countries announced pledges. So we have taken step one, but as Administrator Green says, we need to do a more formal effort.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Gardner?

Senator GARDNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Abrams, Ambassador Green, for your service. I commend you for the work that you are doing on this incredibly important humanitarian and leadership example.

The illegitimate Maduro regime has shown a depraved indifference to human life, to the human condition, to the people of Venezuela, to the Venezuelan nation. But I sense a great deal of energy from the people who are in this room for President Guaidó and the opportunities ahead for a future in Venezuela that Maduro has deprived and taken from the people.

So there is obviously more that Congress can do, obviously more that Congress must do. Obviously, Congress will do more. But the full faith and power and might of the United States behind the people of Venezuela in this effort I think is incredible. Fifty-four nations around the globe gathered together in this effort. We obviously need more. We need more nations to do more, to step up, the donors that Senator Menendez talked about, donor nations that Senator Menendez talked about, the sanctions, the efforts to strongly condemn, to expel, to take and deprive this regime of the funds that it is using to continue its atrocities against its own people.

What more can we do as a Congress to encourage other nations to join this coalition?

Mr. ABRAMS. Maybe this is undiplomatic, but I think there are a number of nations, some in the Caribbean and a couple in Europe, that have not yet recognized Juan Guaidó. I think, actually, if you, if this committee talked to the ambassadors of those nations, it does not happen every day, and I think that your conversations, your pressure would immediately get telegraphed back to those capitals and could make a difference.

Senator GARDNER. Ambassador?

Mr. GREEN. Quite frankly, this hearing, and I think having more hearings like this, and congressional visits down to some of the nations that, as Mr. Abrams pointed to, are perhaps on the fence and need to do more. I think the show of clear bipartisan support is essential to make it very clear this is not about one administration, one U.S. administration, but this is the position of the American people, over and over again, everywhere you can.

Senator GARDNER. And I hope that as people are listening to this hearing, as people read the transcript, they know there is no sideline to sit on, to stand on, that this is a call for action, this is a call for help, this is a call for recognition for the people of Venezuela and the legitimate regime that will come, and the Interim President Guaidó.

You mentioned, Mr. Abrams, Russia and Cuba. Could you talk a little more about China and their role, their interests, what they are doing right now in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. China has lent a lot of money to the Maduro regime. In the United Nations, we did see them twice join the Russians in vetoes. I had hoped that they might move to abstaining, but they have not. And we have made the argument, as Senator Menendez said, that they are not going to get their money back from a bankrupt Venezuela. They are only going to get it back from a Venezuela that is prosperous.

They have differentiated themselves from the Russians, I guess I would say, rhetorically in that the Russians are using really Cold War rhetoric about American imperialism and colonialism and so forth. The Chinese seem to view this more as a commercial proposition: they want their money back. So we continue to push them to make what seems to us the only logical leap here, that then you should be in favor of steps that will bring Venezuela back to prosperity.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you.

Ambassador Green, is there anything you want to add to that?

Mr. GREEN. Well, I certainly agree with everything that my colleague has said. Again, I think what we need to do over and over again is make clear what our purpose is. Our purpose is to restore democracy. It is to give the people of Venezuela the chance to choose their own future, and that is what we seek to do. And, of course, that is a very different model and a very different approach from China, Russia, Cuba, and others.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you.

Mr. Abrams, you mentioned that the talks were supposed to be in confidence, or at least not be discussed. But I am reminded of a saying that I have heard, that Washington is the only place where sound travels faster than light.

[Laughter.]

Senator GARDNER. Thank you for your time in the hearing this morning.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Udall?

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the Ranking Member, for these hearings. And thank you to the witnesses for being here.

There is no doubt that the Maduro regime has caused widespread misery and suffering in Venezuela, and his followers are leading the country down the path of more violence and repression of the Venezuelan people. The United States should work with its partners in the region to restore democratic order and to reduce the threat of increased violence in Venezuela and throughout the region.

However, I am mindful of the long history of U.S. interventions in the region, and that history is part of the historical memory of Latin America as well. U.S. sanctions have given Maduro, and Chavez before him, an easy scapegoat for their own failures. They blame their people's suffering on "Yankees." Now the President of the United States, some members of Congress and others are issuing veiled threats of U.S. military intervention and regime change by force. Shannon O'Neil, a Council on Foreign Relations expert on Latin America and a friend of this committee and a witness before this committee, wrote about this regarding the prospect of military intervention.

She says, "Venezuela is not Granada or Panama, the two Latin American countries invaded by the U.S. during the closing days of the Cold War. Instead, it is twice the size of Iraq with only a slightly smaller population and teeters on the verge of chaos. Any invasion requires preparations on a similar scale, meaning a 100,000-plus force. U.S. troops are unlikely to be welcomed. A February poll shows a majority of Venezuelans, including a plurality of those in Venezuela's opposition, oppose an invasion. A U.S. military presence would play into and would at least, in part, validate Maduro's loudly proclaimed imperialist conspiracies." I believe that on the second panel one of our witnesses, Cynthia Arnson, has come to a similar conclusion in terms of military intervention.

Do either of you believe that a military solution led by the United States is a solution to this crisis?

Mr. ABRAMS. It is certainly not desirable, and it is not the path the Administration is taking.

Mr. GREEN. The best way to answer that is to say I have been part of absolutely no conversations whatsoever that have talked about military intervention.

Senator UDALL. Do you agree that any military intervention would need to be approved by this Congress?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, now we are getting into a War Powers Act question and hypotheticals about what might lead to a military intervention, and I think I should probably not do that, certainly not in an open hearing.

Senator UDALL. Well, Mr. Abrams, the simple principle that I think people who study our Constitution understand is that the Congress, the Congress is the one to declare war, and that is basically what I am asking you about. Do you understand that? I understand the President's Article 2 authority in terms of us being threatened or having an imminent threat, but that is what I am asking you about. Do you agree that if we were going to go in there in an intervention and declare war, that it is the Congress that has to do that?

Mr. ABRAMS. You know, I remember President Clinton's intervention into, say, Kosovo, and there was a big debate about the

War Powers Act, and I am just not prepared really to get into that debate——

Senator UDALL. I am not debating the War Powers Act. I am talking about the constitutional authority of the Congress to be the one that declares war, determines interventions.

Mr. ABRAMS. You know, you have the constitutional authority to declare war. You have the President's authority as Commander in Chief. That would be a great subject for a hearing.

[Laughter.]

Senator UDALL. Okay, good. Well, the Chairman was here earlier, and I am sure the subcommittee chairman will pass that on, and I will try to do the same.

Do you think that a civil war would make life better for the Venezuelan people, either one of you?

Mr. ABRAMS. No, clearly not.

Senator UDALL. Mark?

Mr. GREEN. No.

Senator UDALL. Is the State Department working with Treasury to help mitigate the impact of sanctions on the Venezuelan people, as far as you know? And in light of how the Maduro government has weaponized the propaganda of Yankee imperialism, what is your plan to counter those charges against the American Government and the Lima Group, who we are supporting?

Mr. ABRAMS. We are working with Treasury. I would say we are especially working with USAID on the question of trying to make sure that the sanctions affect the regime but not the Venezuelan people.

As to the broader question, I am struck by the unity that there really is. The history that you have mentioned has not prevented most of the democracies of Latin America and Europe in joining the United States in hemispheric and Western unity, as reflected in the bipartisan unity here. So the regime's arguments about gringos and Yankee imperialism and so forth are, at this point in 2019, really falling without much impact.

Senator UDALL. I would just like to quote, because I may not be here for keeping the military option on the table and all of that kind of thing, and keeping them off balance. The witness in the next panel says, "But this threat has eroded the consensus between the United States, the hemispheric democracies, and the countries of Europe over how to approach the Venezuelan crisis," and that is why I am asking these questions, to try to get to the heart of where the Administration is really at.

I mean, on the one hand we see a remarkable thing here where the President is the most aggressive in terms of using force, and yet many of the Administration officials that appear before us in a variety of contexts in different committees have a totally different line. So it is a little bit of a very difficult situation for us to kind of come to grips with this. We cannot call him down here in front of the committee, but we can get you down here. So there is a stark difference that is there.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the courtesies of running over a little bit.

Senator RUBIO. Mr. Abrams, have any of our international partners told us that they do not want to work with us until the President stops saying all options are on the table?

Mr. ABRAMS. No, none have.

Senator RUBIO. And are there any armed elements of the opposition? Is there an armed opposition group?

Mr. ABRAMS. There is not. The opposition—it is not really opposition anymore. Let's say the legitimate leadership under President Guaidó wants exclusively peaceful change.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both, first of all, for being here today and for what you are doing in this very difficult situation.

I just want to follow up on Senator Udall's question, just to be very clear, because I did not hear either of you answer it in this way. Are either of you aware of any plans within the Administration for any military action in Venezuela? Mr. Abrams?

Mr. ABRAMS. No, not in the sense you mean it. I mean, there are always contingency plans. I do not know how much to get into this in an open hearing, but, for example, for the protection of every single U.S. embassy around the world, there are always such plans. But we are not pursuing that path.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Green?

Mr. GREEN. I am not.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

The discussion this morning has been very eloquent about the terrible tragedy that is happening in Venezuela and about the humanitarian disaster there. But the status of women has not been mentioned, and I think it is important to do that, because there are more reports coming out about the violence that women are facing in Venezuela, that women are facing as they cross the border into Colombia. The International Refugee Committee said that increasing numbers of women and children are fleeing and that as they are fleeing they are facing a unique set of risks around sexual assault, kidnapping, harassment; that many women have turned to sex work to support their families.

So I wonder, Mr. Green, if you could talk about how U.S. assistance is being directed towards the women and children specifically who are being affected.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you for the question, and I will say in my most recent trip down to Cucuta and the centers that I visited, it was a disproportionately large number of young mothers who were there. That was very, very clear, and they felt special pain, not only pain for what they are going through but what they are going through for their families. It really was heartbreaking, to be honest.

In terms of specifics and targeted assistance in that way, part of it is the hygiene supplies that we pre-position and supply. But secondly, you are pointing to something that is very important but I do not think very well covered, and that is these poor people, as they flee tyranny and hunger and so on and so forth, they are very easily exploited.

So we are working in those communities along the border and in other places where we know Venezuelans are fleeing to, to try to

reinforce and provide some level of protection and counseling and places for them to go. It is just one more dark, gloomy part of this terrible crisis.

Mr. ABRAMS. If I could add, Senator, I have the TIP report with me. Venezuela is a Tier 3 country. It does not meet minimum standards, and the report itself says, "Venezuela is a source and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor." So it is a real problem.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. It is just awful, and it reflects again the fact that in conflict areas, that it is women and children who usually bear the brunt of that conflict, and this is another example of that and I think another reason why it is so important that legislation like the Women, Peace, and Security Act that asks that women be at the table when we are negotiating an end to conflicts is so important, because we know that that means that whatever is negotiated lasts longer, and it also means that there is a lower likelihood that women will continue to be placed in positions where they are the victims of so many of these issues, sex trafficking, sexual assault, all of those concerns.

So again, thank you both very much for what you are doing.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the witnesses for very helpful testimony.

I want to just acknowledge and applaud the release of a Virginia journalist, Cody Weddle, who is from Meadowview, Virginia, a Virginia Tech alumnus, who has been in Venezuela reporting independently there for a number of years, who was arrested and interrogated and released overnight. That is good news.

I want to follow up on comments of my colleagues on this side of the aisle about military threat. Having lived in Latin America, this notion of blaming problems on Uncle Sam, on imperialist Yankees, is very, very serious, and the President's comments about military threat I think are a horrible idea. I actually think generally the strategy of sanctions, the work that you have done to cobble together the global coalition I think is very, very good. I think it really creates problems, though, if the message gets mixed with a potential military threat.

I have the same concern Senator Udall raised about who it is that initiates war. It is Congress, not the President, unless there is an imminent threat on the United States, I believe. But more than that, I think loose talk about military action actually cements and emboldens dictators. They want to be able to blame their problems on Uncle Sam, on America, on the West. They would love to be able to blame it on somebody else. As they are running the economy into the ground, whether it is Putin in Russia or Maduro in Venezuela, they would love to be able to blame their own mismanagement and failings on others. And any loose talk about military action brings up this whole history of U.S. military intervention. It gives Maduro the ability to claim that the U.S. is interested in petroleum or whatever else, and I think it is just really important that we stress what our interest is.

The only interest we have is peace, liberty, and democracy for the Venezuelan people. That is it.

[Spanish language spoken.]

Senator KAINE. Not military, not oil. There is nothing we want for ourselves. We only want peace, liberty, and democracy for the Venezuelan people. And I think we need to stress that very clearly.

I want to ask you about you referenced briefly the OAS, and I would kind of like to dig into this, because I think you gave us maybe a good suggestion.

I am troubled by the number of Caribbean nations that have not been supportive of this global coalition, and I read that as a challenge, largely kind of petroleum politics, that Venezuela has used petroleum reserves to purchase their loyalty. You can kind of understand that in realpolitik. I think dialogue is important, and there is an awful lot that we can offer, too, to convince some of those nations to hopefully join the global coalition in support of the interim government and a constitutionally dictated transition to elections and a new government.

So dialogue with the nations that we are talking about. What are other strategies that you might suggest for us, or what is the Administration pursuing in terms of dialogue with nations, especially those in the OAS, to make sure that there is more of a consensus within this important hemispheric organization to help us out?

Mr. ABRAMS. We do have something approaching a consensus on the Latin American side, not on the Caribbean side, and it has been disappointing, because all those countries are democracies, and I think it is for the reasons that you state, debt especially, and in some cases joint ventures with pedevesa over the years.

We continue in all those capitals to push them. The principal deputy in the Latin American Bureau is in the eastern Caribbean right now personally pressing leadership to see if we can move them.

Again, I would say hearing from members of this committee, talking to their ambassadors so they can bring that home would be useful, and we are working with them. Treasury has been working with them and the Energy Department to tell us what the problem is, tell us what you are afraid of, and maybe we can help you.

In the case, for example, of Jamaica recently, they undertook a few transactions that would reduce their ties, let us say, to pedevesa in a very useful way, so they get out from under.

Senator KAINE. Mr. Green?

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Senator. I think one of the ways that we do this is to make sure that our humanitarian foot is forward. So in the case, for example, of Trinidad and Tobago, we have provided \$1.6 million in assistance to help identify the needs of the Venezuelans who have come to the islands looking for ways to tackle the issues of crime and violence and human trafficking, and to try to lower the burden, quite frankly, that they are feeling. So it is something that we are doing regionally.

I will tell you this: I think the impact of the Venezuelan flight in the Caribbean is something that people do not quite appreciate. Last year at the Summit of the Americas we were beginning to hear it, and that was now many months ago. I am sure the numbers have gone way up. It is something where we can reach out, we can provide some support, and I think that would be very helpful.

Senator KAINE. That is very helpful. Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Cruz?

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, good morning. Thank you for your good work.

Globally, gold has become a key way that bad actors conduct illicit financial activities. In Venezuela, the gold trade is Maduro's best and perhaps his last lifeline.

In 2018 alone, Venezuela exported \$900 million worth of gold to Turkey. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Turkey has been making large purchases of gold, almost certainly including illicit purchases from Venezuela.

To cut off this lifeline, I have introduced a bill, along with Chairman Rubio, that says if a country or bank conducts precious metal transactions that are subject to sanctions, as moving gold from Venezuela or Iran would be, that the Secretary of the Treasury can take those transactions into account when deciding about a broader conclusion that such country or bank shall be designated as a jurisdiction of primary money laundering concern.

Mr. Abrams, can you please describe the role that illicit gold and precious metal transactions plays in sustaining the Maduro regime?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thanks, Senator. It is critical. What we did on pedevesa cut off a lot of cash. The oil they were giving to Russia and China was to offset previous debt. They were not getting cash. So they lose that cash. Where can they find cash today? Gold is one of the very few places, and it is the biggest one.

Senator CRUZ. I understand that the Administration is in possession of a list of Turkish entities that are moving gold for Venezuela based on publicly sourced information. Can you outline how the Administration intends to approach these and other bad actors?

Mr. ABRAMS. First, we talk to the governments in question and in some cases the enterprises in question, in almost every case, to say you ought to stop doing this. You ought to stop doing it because it is wrong, and you ought to stop doing it because there are going to be sanctions, and we have had some success in other areas of the world in getting companies to say okay, we do not want the risk of sanctions, we will stop. We have not had that success in the case of gold sales in the Middle East more generally.

Senator CRUZ. Mr. Green, what initiatives can USAID encourage in Venezuela or other partners in the region to deter Maduro's illicit mining and trade of gold and to safeguard the supply chain for Venezuelans?

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Senator. Actually, in countries like Colombia and Peru, we have well-developed, successful, licit mining programs which use environmentally-sound methods for mining. Secondly, because it is licit, it actually provides a revenue source that can be reinvested in the communities and creates good-paying jobs and chokes off the source of illicit gold revenues that we know that narcos and criminal gangs too often use.

So I would propose in that day after in Venezuela that we ramp up investments like this. This is a way of creating very good-paying jobs around which you can raise families and build communities.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Maduro's regime has been holding six Citgo employees, including five U.S. citizens who live in Texas, for over a year now. The Citgo executives have been detained on baseless charges and subjected to harsh imprisonment. It is well past time to secure their release, and it is my hope that the new Venezuelan government will work with the U.S. to swiftly ensure their safe return.

Mr. ABRAMS, is the Administration in discussions with either the Guaidó administration or the Maduro regime on the imprisonment of the Citgo executives who are U.S. dual nationals? And can you describe what efforts are being made to secure their release?

Mr. ABRAMS. As you know, Senator, we are unable to get consular access to them. The position of the regime is because they are also Venezuelan citizens, you do not get to see them. So we have not been able to do that.

It is also true that the church in Venezuela has asked to see them on a pastoral visit—refused, no.

We are in touch with the families. We keep pressing the regime because there are two court orders for their release, which the regime simply refuses to implement.

So we keep pressing. We do keep raising it. I am absolutely confident that at the point at which Interim President Guaidó takes over, their release will be very rapid.

Senator CRUZ. Well, good, and I would encourage you to continue to make that a high priority.

A final question for both of you. This is a pivotal time in Venezuela's history. It is a time of enormous opportunity, but also enormous risk. There are some 3,000 generals in Venezuela. Each of those generals now has to decide with whom he stands, with the illegitimate and oppressive Maduro regime or with the legitimate and recognized Guaidó government.

What do both of you believe could be effective, both carrots and sticks, for those 3,000 generals to encourage them to stand on the right side of history with the people of Venezuela and not to support a dictator on his way out the door?

Mr. ABRAMS. I would say there are two parts to that, the Venezuelan part and the American part. The legitimate National Assembly has passed a transition law that speaks of amnesty, and there are further debates in the National Assembly in Venezuela about saying more about that, being more detailed about what an amnesty would consist of.

On our part, we have made it very clear that sanctions can be removed, visa revocations can be reversed, and visas can be granted. For those who are actually indicted, that is a different story, indicted or convicted. They should have their lawyers deal with the Department of Justice. But from the Treasury and State point of view, these things are reversible, and we are trying to make the argument, and more importantly President Guaidó and the National Assembly are making the argument, that they are open to those who are willing to change.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Senator RUBIO. I want to thank both of you for being here today. We want to get to our second panel. We appreciate the work you are doing and the time you have given us this morning, and we thank you again for being with us.

While we transition, I am going to go ahead and present our second panel. I know we have a vote in about 45 minutes.

I would strongly encourage our witnesses—we have your written testimony. I think you both are veterans of appearing in the committee. These are our non-government experts. I will introduce them as they take their seats here quickly.

The first is Mr. Eric Farnsworth, the Vice President of the Council of the Americas; and Dr. Cynthia Arnson, who is the Director of the Wilson Center's Latin America Program.

I ask those who are here if you would take your seats or transition out because I want to make sure whoever stays gets their questions in. I want to make sure our testimony is in.

Dr. Arnson, we will start with you, if that is okay. Are you ready?

Thank you both for being here.

STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA J. ARNISON, DIRECTOR, LATIN AMERICA PROGRAM, WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS, WASHINGTON, DC

Dr. ARNISON. Great. Thank you, Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the subcommittee, Senator Menendez, who is joining us from Senate Foreign Relations. It is a privilege to be here.

I think both sides of the aisle have adequately described the disaster, humanitarian and economic and political, that Venezuela has come to, so I will skip over that part of my testimony and instead focus on the options for U.S. policy, both their advantages and their risks.

First, sanctions. Building on the actions that started under the Obama Administration and now intensified by the Trump Administration, there has been a dramatic escalation in the range of individual, financial, and now petroleum sanctions on Venezuela. The purpose is obviously to increase substantially and unacceptably the political, economic, and personal costs of the status quo such that people who support the regime currently might be impelled to break with it.

It appears that the pressures are aimed at creating fissures in the armed forces, which, as we all know, are Maduro's key source of support. These divisions could emerge. Some have already, small ones in the leadership, or become more pronounced, especially as the economic sanctions are in place for a longer period of time and have a greater impact.

However, there is no guarantee that even the most punishing sanctions will serve to divide the military hierarchy. There is, in fact, a risk that these sanctions, as has been discussed by Senator Kaine a moment ago, will contribute to greater internal coherence of the regime, a kind of circling of the wagons against foreign efforts.

There is also the devastating human cost of the oil sanctions.

The issue of humanitarian aid needs to be depoliticized. It must adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence, and I believe that the United Nations, many of its agencies—UNICEF, the World Health Organization—and the local Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other relief or-

ganizations on the ground in Venezuela are best positioned to provide expanded assistance.

Many of you have made reference to the impact of the flow of Venezuelan refugees on the countries of the region. I will not go over the numbers. We just heard from USAID Administrator Mark Green. Between USAID and the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, the United States has pledged a significant amount of assistance, but it is still a fraction of the \$738 million that is called for in 2019 alone, called for by the U.N. Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, a joint program of the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees and the International Organization of Migration.

Colombia alone, according to that report, requires \$315 million, which is more than double what the United States has provided to the entire region. I believe that we should put actions behind our words and provide resources that are commensurate with our capacity and our stated foreign policy objectives.

I commend Senator Rubio, Senator Menendez, people on both sides of the aisle who have encouraged the Administration to grant Temporary Protected Status to Venezuelans in the United States, but this should be coupled with an expedited review of asylum claims. Another option is to raise the highly restrictive cap on refugee admissions to the United States, which in 2019 hit an historic low.

I will not go over the issue of military intervention. My remarks have already been quoted by Senator Udall. I think continued talk of a military option, as much as it is useful in keeping the regime off balance, is irresponsible, would spark a regional war and be an incentive for Colombian guerillas from the ELN, the FARC, those who refuse to demobilize, and perhaps even some of those who did demobilize, to join up arms against that.

It is possible that the combination of all of the pressures—diplomatic, economic—that the United States and the international community have brought to bear can bring about a change of government in Venezuela, or even the collapse of the authoritarian regime. I believe, however, that it is also possible that it will survive, much as Assad's Syria has survived, becoming even more repressive in its determination to cling to power, expelling more of its citizens, and turning further to allies such as Russia, Turkey, Cuba, as it seeks survival.

I share the goal that many have stated, that policy of the United States and of the international community should be to create the conditions for a free, fair election in Venezuela in which the opposition can openly compete without disadvantage and take office should it win. That goal will require institutional reform, especially of the Electoral Council. It probably also requires international observation and supervision.

I do not believe it requires the end of Chavismo as a political force. I was heartened to hear people reiterate that concept. And it does foresee its integration into a functioning and pluralistic democracy.

I do not believe that a transition requires the immediate purging of the military, or even the extradition of Venezuelan officials indicted by the United States to face justice in this country. These

are not questions about which there is any ambivalence in the moral or ethical sense. These are strictly practical considerations, how one provides an off ramp for those who are currently aligned with the regime to break with the current government.

Negotiations in Venezuela have acquired a very bad name. They have been tried for many years. The Maduro regime has used them to buy time, divide the opposition, and avoid concessions. I would put on the table now the question as to whether a hurting stalemate, a concept that is mostly used in conflict resolution, is at hand. I believe that it is, and I believe that one possible vehicle is the European Union-led, with Latin American participation, international Contact Group, which does not talk about negotiations. It talks about creating the conditions for a free and fair election as the subject of talks with the government.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Arnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA J. ARNSON

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, It is my privilege to address you today on the crisis in Venezuela and options for U.S. policy.¹

The dimensions of the governance, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela are well documented and well known. Equally well known are the surprising and heady events that have taken place in Venezuela since a heretofore unknown politician, Juan Guaidó, became interim president on January 23, 2019, inspiring the internal opposition and galvanizing a broad international response. As of March 5, 2019, fifty-four countries of the Western Hemisphere, Europe, and Asia have recognized Mr. Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate president, rejecting the results of a deeply flawed election held in May 2018 in which President Nicolás Maduro was ratified for a second term. A February 2019 poll by the Venezuelan polling firm Datanálisis has put Guaidó's support at 61 percent of the population, compared to 14 percent for Maduro, a historic low. The combination of domestic and international pressures has raised hopes as perhaps never before that Venezuela's experiment with "Twenty-First Century Socialism" will end, giving way to democratic change.

Yet there are bumps on the road. Both Maduro and Guaidó appear to believe that time is on their side. Despite hundreds of defections of army and National Guard foot soldiers, the Venezuelan armed forces and especially its senior leadership have remained loyal to Maduro. For how long will that continue? Will crippling U.S. sanctions, now extended to Venezuela's all-important oil industry, divide chavismo? Or will sanctions rally even disaffected chavistas to swallow their criticisms and oppose outside "aggression?" As sanctions deepen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation, will a desperate public lose faith in Guaidó's and the opposition's ability to deliver relief from their crushing personal circumstances? Will the Maduro administration find a way to evade the sanctions, especially by finding other customers for Venezuelan oil? How can the United States and others in the international community best position themselves to enhance the possibilities for a democratic transition that avoids or minimizes the potential for political violence or the use of force?

THE DIMENSIONS OF THE CRISIS

President Nicolás Maduro presided over a skewed electoral process in May 2018, in which the government prohibited the principal opposition candidates from running and other practices affected the election's fairness and independence.²

¹The views expressed in this testimony are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Wilson Center. I am grateful to my colleagues Benjamin Gedan, Rob Litwak, Catalina Casas, and Madalyn Medrano for their insights and research support.

²An especially pernicious tactic was the placing of polling stations next to sites where Venezuelans had to renew their "Fatherland Card" (Carnet de la Patria), used to allot government-subsidized bags of food. See Michael Penfold, "Food, Technology, and Authoritarianism in Venezuela's Elections," April 18, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/food-technology-and-authoritarianism-venezuelas-elections>. A resolution passed by the Organization of American States on June 5, 2018, said that the Presidential election "lack[ed] legitimacy" and did not com-

Over the last several years, and especially since a wave of demonstrations in 2014 challenged his rule, Maduro has deployed a full range of repressive tactics to quell dissent and eliminate challenges to his authority. Government troops have killed hundreds of unarmed demonstrators, while under the guise of fighting crime, hundreds more have been executed in poor neighborhoods, many of them by a police unit loyal to Maduro, the Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales (Special Actions Forces, FAES), created in 2017. According to the leading human rights group Foro Penal, the number of political prisoners stood at 288 in December 2018. Torture of prisoners is commonplace, including—and perhaps especially—of members of the military accused of plotting against the government.³ Armed pro-government paramilitaries known as colectivos have terrorized government opponents, most recently and visibly by opening fire alongside members of the National Guard on activists attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to Venezuela from Colombian and Brazilian territory in late February 2019. Street crime is rampant. Venezuela's Violence Observatory reports that the country's rate of homicides in 2018 was the highest in Latin America, exceeding even the countries of Central America's Northern Triangle.

Venezuela's recent economic decline is breathtaking. Gross Domestic Product has shrunk by nearly half in the last 5 years, a period roughly corresponding to the date of Maduro's 2013 inauguration. According to oil industry sources, the output of the country's State-run oil industry, which provides over 90 percent of Venezuela's foreign exchange, has dropped by two-thirds, from approximately 3.1 million barrels per day (bpd) in 1998 when President Hugo Chávez was first elected to 1.15 million bpd in December 2018. The International Monetary Fund estimates that inflation in 2018 reached 1 million percent; and if that figure seems incomprehensible, the IMF predicts that inflation will reach a staggering 10 million percent this year. A recent survey by three of Venezuela's leading universities documented that fully 87 percent of the Venezuelan population live in poverty (up from 48.4 percent in 2014). This is not, as the Venezuelan government contends, the result of sanctions or foreign hostility, but the product of chronic mismanagement, staggering levels of corruption, and relentless hostility to the private sector, reflected in the expropriation of thousands of private companies over the last two decades. Adding to the misery of ordinary Venezuelans is the collapse of the health care system. The World Health Organization and Pan-American Health Organization have documented the extent to which hospitals and clinics lack the basic medicines and supplies to provide even a minimum level of care, and once-eradicated diseases such as measles, tuberculosis, diphtheria are on the rise—and are being exported to Venezuela's neighbors through migratory flows.

In the face of political repression and economic calamity, as of February 2019 3.4 million Venezuelans had fled their homes in search of basic survival. The overwhelming majority have left since 2015. According to the United Nations, that is an average of 5,000 a day. In the words of UN-IOM Joint Special Representative of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants Eduardo Stein, the Venezuelan migrant flows constitute "the largest displacement of people in the history of Latin America."⁴ Colombia alone has over 1.1 million Venezuelans, followed by Peru (506,000), Chile (288,000), Ecuador (221,000), Argentina (130,000), and Brazil (96,000). The absolute numbers that have fled to countries of the Caribbean—Curaçao, Aruba, Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic, and others—are smaller, but constitute a much larger percentage of the island nations' population overall.

OPTIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

Over the past several years, and building on initial actions taken by the Obama Administration, the Trump administration has dramatically escalated a range of sanctions—individual, financial, and most recently on the oil sector—in an effort to punish the anti-democratic and corrupt behavior of senior Venezuelan officials and to impose hardships that could lead to regime change. Over the last two administrations, the most senior levels of the U.S. Government have also worked to forge a hemispheric consensus in favor of strong multilateral action against the Maduro government. Latin American and some Caribbean countries themselves, deeply af-

ply with international standards. The resolution passed, 19–4, with 11 abstentions. See <http://www.oas.org/en/media-center/press-release.asp?sCodigo=S-32/18>.

³See Human Rights Watch, "Venezuela: Suspected Plotters Tortured," January 0, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/09/venezuela-suspected-plotters-tortured>.

⁴Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, January–December 2019.

fectured by the flood of Venezuelan refugees, have acted through the Lima Group⁵ and the Organization of American States to condemn the actions of the Maduro government and call for free elections, respect for human rights, and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Countries of the European Union have added their voices in support of these objectives. The Venezuelan opposition and Juan Guaidó in particular have called on the international community to intensify pressure on the Maduro administration, join the United States in financial and other sanctions, and help deliver humanitarian aid.

What follows is a discussion of the benefits and risks of various approaches available to the United States and others in the international community in support of a democratic outcome in Venezuela.

SANCTIONS

The purpose of sanctions is to increase substantially—and unacceptably—the political, economic, and personal costs of the status quo, such that supporters of the regime have reason to break with Maduro. The logic of sanctions is to change the calculus of core interest groups that keep the regime in power; sanctions are thus part of a strategy of coercive diplomacy aimed at modifying behavior or producing regime change.⁶

The literature on regime change indicates that divisions within the ruling elite of an authoritarian regime can make a democratic opening possible. In the case of Venezuela, economic pressure appears directed at creating fissures in the armed forces, Maduro's key source of support. These divisions might emerge—or become more pronounced—in light of the drastic economic impact of recently imposed U.S. oil sanctions. The effects of the oil sanctions will build over time, but their true political impact may not be known for many months.

However, there is no guarantee that even the most punishing sanctions will serve to divide the military hierarchy. The top echelons of the Venezuelan armed forces are deeply involved in corruption and organized crime,⁷ control key sectors of the economy (the State-owned oil company PDVSA, the mining industry, and food distribution, among others) and have a great deal to lose by abandoning the regime. There is the risk that sanctions will contribute to greater internal coherence, a 'circling of the wagons' against foreign efforts to topple the government. This appears to be the case, at least in the short run. For example, when Juan Guaidó and international relief agencies attempted to deliver humanitarian aid from across the border in Colombia and Brazil in late February, senior members of the armed forces remained united in their determination to block the supplies. Backed by the *colectivos*, government troops resorted to violence, killing a number of people and injuring hundreds. Recent interviews with *chavistas* also provide initial anecdotal evidence that even those critical of the country's leadership and direction reluctantly back the Maduro government in the face of U.S. pressure.⁸

There is also the devastating human cost of the oil sanctions, given the Maduro government's dependence on oil revenues to import food and medicine. As recommended by the Lima Group—and to mitigate the additional toll that sanctions will impose on already impoverished Venezuelans—the U.S. Government and others in the international community should avoid politicizing the issue of humanitarian aid. To be effective, humanitarian aid must adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. United Nations agencies, the local Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and others relief organizations on the ground in Venezuela can provide expanded assistance that is need-based and free of political objectives. In addition, the United States should consider partially lifting oil sanctions against Venezuela in order to permit revenues from the sale of oil to be used strictly for the import of essential food and medicine.⁹ This assistance must be distributed by a neutral third party in Venezuela, not the government. It also must take place under international supervision, to avoid the corruption that has plagued such programs in the past.

⁵ The Lima Group member States are Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru.

⁶ IASee Robert S. Litwak, *Outlier States: American Strategies to Change, Contain, or Engage Regimes* (Washington, DC, and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

⁷ See InSight Crime, "Venezuela: A Mafia State?" 2018, <https://www.insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Venezuela-a-Mafia-State-InSight-Crime-2018.pdf>.

⁸ Ivan Briscoe, "Will Maduro's Supporters Abandon Him?" *Foreign Affairs*, February 25, 2019.

⁹ A similar argument is made by Francisco Rodríguez, "Why Venezuela needs an oil-for-food programme," *Financial Times*, February 27, 2019.

HELPING NATIONS COPE WITH THE REGIONAL IMPACTS OF VENEZUELA'S MELTDOWN

The accelerated collapse of Venezuela's economy will push ever more Venezuelans to migrate to neighboring countries. The United Nations reported in February that it expects the number of refugees to reach 5.3 million by the end of 2019, a more than 55 percent in just 1 year. Latin American countries have done a remarkable job in issuing residence permits and other documents to regularize the status of migrants, allowing them access public services and permission to work. Goodwill and generosity aside, however, the countries of the region simply do not have the service delivery capacity or financial resources to continue to address the emergency needs of such massive refugee flows or to absorb them on a permanent basis. All of the recipient nations are developing countries with their own challenges, including poverty, unemployment and informality, and the poor quality of government services such as health and education. It is only a matter of time before what have been up to now sporadic outbursts of violence and xenophobia aimed at refugees become more frequent and corrosive to the democratic and social fabric of Venezuela's neighbors. Given Latin America's overall lackluster economic performance in recent years, it is likely that resentment will grow among native-born populations.

The U.S. Government, through USAID and the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, has pledged over \$152 million between fiscal years 2017–2019 for the Venezuela regional response. This is a significant amount, but still a fraction of the \$738 million called for in 2019 in the UN's 2019 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan. Colombia alone requires over \$315 million, more than double what the United States has pledged to the entire region. It is risky in the current U.S. budget and political climate to call for higher levels of foreign aid. But the crisis in Venezuela has been elevated to a position of central concern to President Trump, the highest levels of his administration, and the U.S. Congress. As sanctions accelerate Venezuela's economic freefall, we should demonstrate our commitment to mitigating the additional suffering caused by these actions by providing resources commensurate with our capacity and stated foreign policy objectives.

Leading by example also requires that we treat Venezuelans who are in the United States or wish to come here with the same compassion exhibited by Venezuela's neighbors. I commend Senator Rubio and his colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and in both the House and Senate, who have encouraged the administration to grant Temporary Protected Status to Venezuelans in this country. While this normalizes the status of Venezuelans already in the United States, it does not by itself provide relief to those who have yet to enter. To accommodate Venezuelans who are compelled by circumstances to migrate, approval of TPS should be coupled with the expedited review of asylum claims. Another alternative is to raise the highly restrictive cap on refugee admissions to the United States, which in 2019 hit a historic low.

MILITARY INTERVENTION

Since President Trump first spoke publicly of a military option in August 2017, numerous senior U.S. officials have reiterated that "all options are on the table." There is undoubtedly psychological value in keeping the Maduro government guessing and off-balance with respect to U.S. intentions. But this threat has eroded the consensus between the United States, hemispheric democracies, and the countries of Europe over how to approach the Venezuelan crisis. I personally believe that the likelihood of U.S. military intervention in Venezuela is low. That said, one should not underestimate the drastic consequences for regional stability should it occur. Military action would undoubtedly provoke an armed response from Colombia's ELN guerrillas, many of whom are based in Venezuelan territory where they have a significant presence in the illegal mining of gold.¹⁰ Some 1,500–2,000 members of Colombia's FARC guerrillas who refused to lay down their weapons following the 2016 peace agreement would also undoubtedly join the fray, as perhaps, would even some FARC members who did demobilize but whose lives remain precarious. The end result would be the regionalization of a conflict in which thousands of seasoned combatants come to the aid of the "Bolivarian revolution." Armed colectivos, estimated to number in the tens of thousands, have no battle training but are capable of waging a dirty, urban guerrilla war. In such circumstances, continued talk of a military option is nothing short of irresponsible.

¹⁰International Crisis Group, "Gold and Grief in Venezuela's Violent South," February 28, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/073-gold-and-grief-venezuelas-violent-south>.

IS A PACTED REGIME TRANSITION AN OPTION?

It is possible that the combination of internal and external pressure on the Maduro administration that we are currently witnessing is sufficient to bring about a change of government or even the collapse of the authoritarian regime. It is also possible, however, that the regime will survive, becoming even more repressive in its determination to cling to power, expelling even more of its hungry citizens, and turning further to allies such as Russia (to purchase Venezuelan oil and provide some food and medicine) Turkey (to monetize Venezuelan gold), and others to mitigate the effects of U.S. sanctions. The role of Cuban advisers in identifying and neutralizing internal threats from within the armed forces is likely to increase, especially in light of increased U.S. hostility to the Cuban regime.

Theories of transition, whether from dictatorship to democracy or from war to peace, emphasize the role of “hurting stalemates”¹¹ in which the cost of continuing on a certain path appears higher than the cost of seeking an alternative. “Hurting stalemates” can emerge as a result of objective conditions—huge battlefield reversals for one side in an armed conflict, for example. But they are also highly subjective, rooted in the perceptions of key leaders as to their future with and without a negotiated outcome.¹² Influencing perceptions requires offering incentives in addition to meting out punishment. The contours of what a negotiated settlement in Venezuela could look like require extensive consultation. The goal, however, is straightforward—to create the conditions for a free and fair election in Venezuela in which the opposition can openly compete without disadvantage and assume office should it win. Does that goal require institutional reform, especially of the electoral council? Yes. Does it require international observation and perhaps even supervision of the process? Again, yes. Does it require the end of chavismo as a political force, or its integration into a functioning, pluralistic democracy? No to the first, yes to the second. Does it require the immediate purging of the military, or the extradition of Venezuelan officials indicted by the United States to face justice in this country? I believe the answer is no.

Successful democratic transitions unfold over time, guaranteeing initially a basic set of new rules of the game, the preservation of the core interests of key actors with the power to threaten or halt the transition, and the establishment of processes for the channeling of differences. They require flexibility regarding preconditions and significant and at times deeply distasteful compromises among former antagonists.¹³ Negotiations in the Venezuelan context have an extremely bad name. They were used by Maduro for years to buy time, divide the opposition, and avoid concessions. The question is whether in today’s circumstances a true “hurting stalemate” is at hand. I believe that it is, and that it is therefore up to us to marshal the imagination to identify and commit to the needed compromises to bring about a democratic and non-violent outcome to Venezuela’s current tragedy.¹⁴

Senator RUBIO. Mr. Farnsworth?

**STATEMENT OF ERIC FARNSWORTH, VICE PRESIDENT,
COUNCIL OF THE AMERICAS, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. FARNSWORTH. Mr. Chairman, good morning. And good morning to Mr. Ranking Member, Mr. Menendez, Mr. Cruz, and from

¹¹I. William Zartman, “Ripening Conflict, Ripe Moment, Formula, and Mediation,” Bendahmane and McDonald, eds., *Perspectives on Negotiation: Four Case Studies and Interpretations* (Washington, DC: Foreign Service Institute, 1986).

¹²Cynthia J. Arnson, ed., *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America* (Washington, DC, and Palo Alto: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 1999. 451–54.

¹⁴See Abraham F. Lowenthal, “Trump can’t solve Venezuela’s crisis alone. Achieving peace will require difficult compromises, not force,” NBC News, February 1, 2019; and International Crisis Group, “Negotiating an Exit from Venezuela’s Bruising Deadlock,” March 4, 2019.

¹⁵The EU-led International Contact Group could provide a mechanism that avoids the pitfalls of past negotiations with Maduro. Its goals are two-fold: “i) establish the necessary guarantees for a credible electoral process, within the earliest timeframe possible; ii) enable the urgent delivery of assistance in accordance with international humanitarian principles.” The group includes representatives of the EU, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, the UK, and Sweden as well as Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Uruguay. See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/57788/international-contact-group%E2%80%937-february_en. See also, David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “El Grupo de Contacto Internacional: la mejor oportunidad de Venezuela,” *New York Times en Español*, February 12, 2019.

my home State of Virginia, of course, Mr. Kaine. Thank you for the invitation again to appear before all of you. It is a real privilege.

Before I begin my remarks, let me reiterate comments that have already been made by several members of the subcommittee about the bipartisan nature of this issue. This is huge, it is fundamental, and it puts the United States behind this effort. I think, first of all, that is critically important. But second, I want to thank the members of the subcommittee in particular for your leadership and for the way that you have positioned this issue. I believe that that is fundamental and very, very important, so thank you.

Let me give you the bottom line first, if I may. I believe Chavismo has turned Venezuela into a ruined state. The nation that boasts the world's largest proven oil reserves is an economic basket case, wracked by hyperinflation, shrinking economic growth, food and medical shortages, and criminal bands, including officially sanctioned drug traffickers, and street crime. The private sector is prostrate, and investment has essentially dried up. Oil production, which is the lifeblood of the economy, has collapsed through lack of investment, unimaginable corruption, and the loss of essential human capital. Abundant natural resources such as gold, which we have already heard about, are being plundered, leading to a full-scale assault on Venezuela's fragile Amazonian ecosystem.

As the economy has soured, Nicolas Maduro has tightened control. Every institution except the National Assembly has been bent to his will. The rule of law has been thoroughly corrupted. The press has been coopted or muzzled, and journalists harassed and detained, and we have already heard about Cody Weddle and Jorge Ramos in this hearing this morning. Social media is being monitored actively. Venezuela's intelligence and security services, and other state functions, are strongly influenced, if not directed, by thousands of Cubans embedded in the regime.

Mr. Chairman, outsiders have already intervened in Venezuela and continue to do so. With more than 10 percent of Venezuela's total population now outside the nation and more leaving every day, we are witnessing the worst manmade humanitarian tragedy of the modern era in the Western Hemisphere.

The United States has received thousands of Venezuelans, and bipartisan legislation has been introduced—we have already talked about this—to provide TPS to some 72,000 Venezuelans who are already here.

The dramatic return to Venezuela this week of Interim President Juan Guaidó has given renewed hope to the Venezuelan people. His task, moving Venezuela toward free and fair elections, is greatly complicated by Maduro's continued occupation of Miraflores Palace. With Maduro's departure it would be possible to contemplate a successful re-launch of Venezuela's democratic system, including the release of political prisoners, restoring press freedoms, and depoliticizing electoral mechanisms, and that is just the beginning.

Reconstruction will also be long and arduous. The new government will require breathing room to get itself established, no doubt. Quick disbursing aid from the international community is therefore essential.

Citizens of Venezuela must be convinced that their lives will meaningfully improve under democracy. Transparency and enforce-

able rule of law are key to this issue. It will be of little benefit, in my view, to replace existing corruption with new corruption. Faith in the new democratic government will be fragile and can easily be destroyed without attention to such issues.

Venezuela was at one point Latin America's wealthiest nation. Someday it may be again. Meanwhile, the humanitarian tragedy caused by Chavismo and its leaders gets worse every day. The Maduro regime has shown it would rather kill its own people than allow foreign aid into the country to help them. Continually escalating sanctions, including visa restrictions, are therefore an appropriate response. Ultimately, however, the regime will have to depart for lasting recovery and true reconstruction to begin.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you again today for the opportunity to testify before you and the subcommittee, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Farnsworth follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERIC FARNSWORTH

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee. It is a privilege to appear before you today to discuss U.S.-Venezuela relations and what it will take to return that proud nation to a vibrant democratic path. Thank you for the attention that you are bringing to these important issues, and for your leadership in addressing them, which has been critical. We very much appreciate your strong, focused, bipartisan interest in restoring Venezuela's future to the Venezuelan people, and look forward to supporting your efforts moving ahead.

OUTLINES OF THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS

To give you the bottom line first: Venezuela has been wrecked by Chavismo. By now the outlines of the economic, political, and humanitarian crisis are well-known.

The nation that boasts the world's largest proven oil reserves is an economic basket case, wracked by hyperinflation, shrinking economic growth, food and medical shortages, and criminal bands and street crime. The private sector is prostrate and investment has essentially dried up. Oil production—the lifeblood of the economy—has collapsed through lack of investment, unimaginable corruption, and the loss of essential human capital. U.S. purchases of oil have steadily declined, even before sanctions. Much of the oil production that remains is either given outright to Cuba or delivered to China, Russia, and others through sweetheart deals. Abundant natural resources such as gold are being plundered by the regime and others including recalcitrant FARC and ELN guerrillas seeking safe-haven from Colombia, leading to a full-scale assault on Venezuela's fragile Amazonian ecosystem which may never recover.

Even as the economy has soured, the Maduro regime has tightened its control on the Venezuelan people. Every institution of the State except the National Assembly has been bent to the will of the executive. The rule of law has been thoroughly corrupted. The press has been shuttered, co-opted, and muzzled, and journalists harassed and detained. Social media is monitored.

Increasingly, through technology sold by China and Russia and applied under their and also Cuban tutelage, the Maduro regime has taken steps surreptitiously to identify and track both regime supporters and also those who do not support the regime. Its intelligence and security services and other State functions are strongly influenced if not directed by thousands of Cuban personnel embedded in State organs. Outside intervention has already occurred and continues to occur in support of the Maduro regime.

From the humanitarian perspective, with more than 10 percent of Venezuela's total population now outside the Nation and more leaving every day, we are witnessing the worst man-made humanitarian tragedy of the modern era in the Western Hemisphere. Refugees are flowing out of Venezuela's porous borders into Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and even as far away as Chile and Spain, in addition to, among other places, the small islands of the Caribbean that can be reached by boat. Needless to say, virtually none of these economies have the absorptive capacity to receive significant population inflows from Venezuela, especially over the longer term. For its part, the United States has already received thousands of Venezuelans

with more on the way, and, on a bipartisan basis, legislation has been introduced to provide Temporary Protected Status for 18 months for some 72,000 Venezuelans already here.

NEXT STEPS TOWARD DEMOCRATIC RESTORATION

The dramatic return to Venezuela of interim President Juan Guaidó earlier this week has given a renewed spark of hope to the Venezuelan people. His courageous acceptance of the burden of leadership has led to threats against him and his family, consistent with similar tactics employed by the Maduro regime against its political opponents: harassment and arrest, exile, or even death. Guaidó's actions have unified the opposition and provided the Venezuelan people with one individual around whom to rally.

Nicolas Maduro's May 2018 "re-election" was a farce. Although he continues to occupy the Miraflores Palace, his term in office ended on January 10, 2019, and his efforts to remain as leader thereafter by proclaiming himself president and fraudulently re-inaugurating himself have been widely rejected by the international community. Under Venezuela's Chavez-promulgated constitution, in the absence of an elected president the leader of the National Assembly is recognized as the interim president, with a mandate to establish conditions for and to oversee free and fair elections to determine the next president. This the role into which Guaidó has been thrust.

His task is complicated. Because the Maduro regime will never allow free and fair elections to occur, the regime will have to leave office and, likely, depart the country altogether, as a condition precedent for such elections. Regime departure would allow for the relaunching of Venezuela's fully politicized and corrupted electoral machinery, from voter lists both inside and outside Venezuela, to voting machines free from irregularities and cyber manipulation, to the establishment of a fully independent body of non-partisan electoral authorities. Candidates for office will have to be restored through the release from arrest and the return from exile of leading opposition political figures. A democratic renewal will require the restoration of press freedoms which have been systematically destroyed by the regime, ending State control of media and censorship in order to reach those with limited access to alternative media and technology. It will also require a significant in-country presence of professional elections systems officials not just election-day monitors, with a mandate to restore procedural independence from any government or political party. It will require enhanced physical security both in the cities and rural areas, to prevent harassment and intimidation of voters, especially in areas with a strong Chavista overlay. And it will also require, on the economic front, immediate humanitarian assistance and the restoration of functioning economic signals so that Venezuelans will be able to return home to their native country both as voters and also as pilgrims and pioneers in the restoration of a nation.

TOWARD ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstruction will be long and arduous. It will be politically complicated. Transparency and certain and enforceable rule of law will be key. Venezuela's institutions have been so thoroughly corrupted by Chavismo that the faith of the people can only be restored by a tangible indication that their lives under a freely and fairly elected government will meaningfully improve.

Initial steps for reconstruction will have to include restoring the value of the national currency and the slaying of hyperinflation, unifying and rationalizing policies that enable massive corruption including exchange rate policy, restoring the independence and professionalism of the central bank, restoring the independence and professionalism of national oil company PDVSA (and ending daily deliveries of free oil to Cuba), freeing of private sector activities generally to regenerate productive capacity, welcoming new inflows of direct foreign investment, and conducting privatizations. That is just the beginning. And these activities will all have to be done transparently and without a hint of corruption, which would immediately hinder Venezuela's return to democracy by causing voters to raise questions of fairness. It will be no benefit to replace existing corruption with new corruption or to replace one set of oligarchs with another; faith in the new government will be fragile and can easily be destroyed without attention to these fundamental issues.

Meanwhile, the new government will require breathing room to get itself established. Quick disbursing aid is essential. Bridge aid from the international financial institutions will be critical, as will bilateral assistance, renegotiation of Paris Club and other debt, and a rational, transparent, and orderly process to address bondholder and other claims. Oil will continue to be the most significant part of Venezuela's economy and will be the primary driver of recovery. But production will also

take some significant time to recover, and previous arrangements unwound, before the oil sector will be sufficiently able to fulfill its manifest role. Seizure and return of ill-gotten assets must also be a priority, both as a law enforcement and also an economic matter, although it is unclear how long such activities will take or the ultimate magnitude of successful recovery efforts, and therefore how much such efforts will be able to contribute to reconstruction.

Venezuela was, at one point, Latin America's wealthiest nation. Someday it may be again. To get there, the current occupants of the Miraflores Palace must depart, and the international community will have to come alongside the Venezuelan people to offer financing and technical assistance, among other things, to help restore and relaunch democracy. Meanwhile, the humanitarian tragedy caused by Chavismo shows no sign of abating; in fact, it gets worse every day. So long as the Maduro regime remains in place, the United States together with our regional and extra-regional allies must continue to insist that the Maduro regime open its doors to the assistance that has been accumulating outside Venezuela's borders, doing what we can to help the interim government deliver aid to suffering Venezuelans both in and outside the country.

Current circumstances whereby the Maduro regime would rather kill its own people than allow aid into the country to help them are simply unacceptable. People are suffering and people are dying, needlessly, at the foot of an ideological alter. Continued sanctions are thus an appropriate response in an effort to get the Maduro regime to change course, to depart voluntarily or to be forced out by the people of Venezuela perhaps through the military acting according to the national constitution.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Senator CARDIN?

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank both of our witnesses. And again, thank you for your patience. It is important that we have the views not only from our government witnesses but from the private sector.

Dr. Arnson, I just want to underscore the point that you made that has been talked about by several of the members, and that is keeping all options on the table and the potential use of the U.S. military, which I would strongly disagree with at this point.

But just to underscore the point that you made in your statement that it would erode the consensus between the United States hemispheric democracies and the countries of Europe over how to approach the Venezuelan crisis, and then you pointed out that one should not underestimate the drastic consequences for regional stability should it occur, I think we all share those sentiments, and I was pleased to see the response from the government witnesses as to the no planning on the use of military.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Cruz?

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to start with the same question that I asked the previous panel, which is we are at a potential tipping point in Venezuela, and in particular the military and the generals have to make a decision with whom to stand. In both of your opinions and judgment, what carrots or sticks would have the greatest impact in speeding along the exit of Maduro and a transition to a democratically elected and legitimate regime?

Mr. FARNSWORTH. Thank you, Senator Cruz. I agree with the implications of the question that the real arbiter on the ground in Venezuela is the military and those with the guns, which is the monopoly of the regime at this point. So at some point you have

to either get them to stand down or switch sides and switch their allegiance to Mr. Guaidó as the interim president.

These are individual decisions. These are decisions that are made based on people's best guess for their own prospects and that of their family, and our understanding is that many of the people who remain "loyal to the regime" are not doing so because they particularly like Mr. Maduro, or even like his social project or whatever it is, but because they are afraid. They are afraid that they will obviously lose their jobs and their pensions, but they might actually be killed, and the way that the security services are being monitored, not just by the Venezuelans but also by some of their outside advisors, there is a real sense of who may be looking to create conditions to try to overthrow the government or leave or what have you. So it is a very delicate situation.

What can the United States and the international community do? I think we can continue, as was discussed in the previous panel, to express openness that those who do not have blood on their hands, those who have not participated in human rights abuses would be welcomed into a new Venezuela. I think that is absolutely appropriate.

But I think at the end of the day, the people have to understand that there will be change in Venezuela because they want to be on the winning side, they want to be on the side that is left standing. If they think that Mr. Maduro will have the opportunity to remain forever, then the choice to switch their allegiance to Mr. Guaidó becomes that much more fraught. If they believe that Mr. Guaidó, in fact, will be ascending to real power in the Miraflores Palace, then the decision in some way becomes a little bit easier. I am not saying it is easy, but it will be easier.

So to the extent that the international community can continue to show the commitment for real and lasting democracy in Venezuela, I believe that is the most potent thing that we can do at this time.

Dr. ARNSON. I would like to add to that. It is going to be very difficult, I think, to break the high command. The number that I have heard is 2,000, Senator Cruz, not 3,000, but it is still a substantial number, and whatever it is, it is at least double, if not triple, what we have in the United States in an armed force that is vastly larger.

I recall that in the Chilean transition, General Pinochet, who subsequently was made to stand trial for his crimes of torture and killing of political opponents, remained as the head of the armed forces and then became a senator for life.

There are things that are done at the outset of a transition that are deeply distasteful, repugnant. But nonetheless, I also recall the words of a great teacher, friend, jurist from Chile who headed their Truth Commission, Jose Zalaquett, who talked about the "ethics of responsibility," which is to say that we are not talking necessarily about pure justice right away. Obviously, everyone should have to pay for crimes against humanity, for torture, for killing, for the levels of corruption and drug trafficking that they have engaged in. But what you can accomplish initially as you have a transitional government leading to elections is very different from what can

occur down the line, and I think the United States has an important role to play in this.

Again, as distasteful and contrary to the whole concept of the rule of law that this may seem, if people feel that if they change or if they somehow agree to break with the regime, what awaits them is a super-max jail cell in the United States, you will never see the movement of those people. We have to think in very pragmatic terms, not in absolutist terms, be flexible, but also listen to what the Venezuelan opposition is doing in terms of speaking to the military, making that outreach, because it is clear that the offer of amnesty has not yet been sufficient.

Senator CRUZ. One additional question, Mr. Farnsworth. You made reference to the Cuban soldiers and thugs that are on the ground in Venezuela. Can you detail a bit more the malign influence that Cuba is having propping up the Maduro regime?

Mr. FARNSWORTH. From what I know from outside open sources, they have been very active particularly in the security services, offering not just guidance in terms of how to organize intelligence operations but also helping the Venezuelans carry them out in some cases. They have also been active in state functions such as passport agencies and authorities so that they know who is coming in and out of the country, and these are reports from open sources, et cetera.

You do not need a whole lot of people from outside the country to do a lot of damage if they are embedded in the most sensitive areas of the government and the areas that have control of the population, and this is what the Cubans have primarily focused on, is my understanding.

So with that in mind, it has become a very complicated effort, and to try to get some of these folks, Venezuelans, who may want to do the right thing, they do not know who is watching them, they do not know what information they have on them, they do not know who is watching their families. It is a really complicated and difficult scenario.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Menendez?

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I want to thank our witnesses for their longstanding sharing of their knowledge with the committee over many different issues, over many different times.

I really just want to make a statement. I understand the concern of many, including some of my colleagues, about military intervention in Venezuela. But I am concerned that in the process of that constant refrain, that we lose sight of who the Venezuelan people have to have real fear of.

The Venezuelan people have the threat of military force by only one entity. That is Nicolas Maduro and the generals who have to decide whether or not they are going to support democracy and human rights or whether they are going to support a dictatorship and turn their guns on their brothers and sisters.

That is why our message is very clear: if your hands are free of blood and human rights violations, you have a future. President Guaidó has said that you have a future, and you have a future free

of sanctions that the United States will follow you anywhere in the world unless you do not have blood on your hands.

There is only one entity in which the Venezuelan people face violence, and that is from the colectivos and the armed thugs that Nicolas Maduro has unleashed upon its people, not from any other entity in the hemisphere.

There is only one person who causes the suffering of the Venezuelan people. It is not sanctions by the United States or anyone else. It is by the failed policies of Nicolas Maduro, who takes one of the wealthiest countries in the Western Hemisphere and has his people eating out of garbage.

It is only one entity that has stolen the national patrimony of Venezuela, and that is Nicolas Maduro.

And it is only one set of interventions that has taken place inside of Venezuela. It has taken place by Cuba, that has its security apparatus propping up Maduro. If you go into Caracas, you ultimately get searched by Cuban agents. Cuban agents are in the midst of creating silos among the generals in Venezuela so that they cannot talk to each other because they are fearful that if they do, that their head will roll, and they therefore cannot talk about joining together to maybe support a democratic government. That is intervention.

There is only one intervention by a foreign country. That is Russia, as it continues to prop up the Maduro regime in a whole host of ways, not the United States of America.

And finally, I really tire somewhat of the suggestion about our sanctions. I have done foreign policy for 27 years between the House and the Senate. I only know of a handful of peaceful diplomacy tools to get countries to move in a certain direction. International criticism, condemnation and opprobrium may move a democracy, but I have not seen it move many dictators. I wish that it would, but it has not.

So what are we left with? Unlike Russia, that uses military adventurism to pursue its foreign policy goals, we only have a handful of peaceful diplomacy tools, the use of our aid to induce countries to act a certain way, the use of our trade and access to our markets to induce countries to act a certain way, the leverage of our entities like USAID to help countries, and then there is the denial of aid or trade or access to our financial institutions, which we generally call sanctions.

Now, I would be happy to get a lesson about what other phalanx of peaceful diplomacy tools we have. So unless we are willing to accept a dictatorship that oppresses its people, that does so by force, and that has them eating out of garbage cans and denies them the critical medicines necessary to stay alive, I am not going to be repentant about our advocacy for sanctions as a peaceful tool to try to move a country in a better direction, and that includes Venezuela.

So I hope we just do not lose our eyes on who is responsible for the suffering of the Venezuelan people. His name is clear. It is etched in stone. It is etched in history. And hopefully he will face the opprobrium of history at the end of the day, and that is Nicolas Maduro.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

I am reclaiming my time, and then I will recognize Senator Kaine, and then, unless anybody else comes, we will wrap up.

The 3.4 million people who left Venezuela were from 2014 to 2018. The U.N. projection that 2 million more were going to leave was established late last year as well.

The figure that 90 percent of the people of Venezuela live in poverty and have lost on average 24 pounds was a 2018 number.

The chronic and infectious diseases running rampant, hospitals lacking in supplies, has been ongoing for a number of years.

The reduction in refining capacity, down to about only 25 percent due to poor management, poor maintenance, is preexisting back to 2018 and before.

The repeated denial of recognizing humanitarian catastrophe, much less allowing humanitarian aid to enter the country, did not begin on February 24th. This has been a longstanding policy of the Maduro regime.

And I say all this because the idea that sanctions are going to exacerbate the humanitarian condition of the Venezuelan people assumes that any of the revenue they were generating previous to the sanctions—because up until the 24th of January, all the sanctions were on individuals. They were on people, not on any sectors. So the argument that sanctions could make things worse assumes that the Venezuelan people were enjoying any of the benefits of the revenue that was being generated previous to that, which all the evidence was clear that they were not.

On the contrary, I know of no other nation—maybe there is one; I do not know—in which their defense minister also happens to be the chairman of the board of oil and gas. I know of no other place where public servants who have served in government their entire lives are able to send their children abroad on shopping sprees in the tens of thousands of dollars. I know of no other nation in which—I guess I do not know the right terminology, but where the second in command has never been to the U.N. building, lives in New York and no one has seen her. That is Chavez' daughter, who is living in the evil United States, enjoying life in New York.

So I think it is important to touch upon that point because in the days to come, as Venezuela faces severe shortages of fuel, you have to ask yourself how could you possibly face a severe shortage of fuel? You sit on the world's richest supply of oil. The answer is because your refining capacity does not exist, because instead of buying replacement parts and paying workers, you gave the state oil company over to your buddies so they can run it into the ground. It is like a tenant who is being evicted and they steal the copper wire out of the wall. I mean, they have stolen everything they can get their hands on, and that is why you have an extraordinary amount of wealth.

In fact, it is funny to hear from all these regime insiders, because they all reach out. Every single one of them sends out messages: Would I be an acceptable alternative? Can you give me visas for my family in exchange for us breaking? It is funny to hear them say, by the way, I am just corrupt; I am not a narco trafficker. I am just old-fashioned corrupt with hundreds of millions of dollars.

What other country in the world has generals who make hundreds of millions of dollars? That is a heck of a pension plan. I have never seen anything like that anywhere in the world. They are getting their money from somewhere, and every penny that goes into their hands is not going to the Venezuelan people.

So the bottom line is that this did not start yesterday, nor did it start on the 24th of January, when sanctions were imposed on the oil industry. The fact of the matter is that virtually every penny generated from the sale of oil for cash that was sold primarily to the United States, of which it is a very small percentage of our capacity but a significant percentage of what they sell for cash around the world, went to their pockets, went into their hands. And all of the narco-trafficking fees that they charge go into their hands. None of that finds its way to the people of Venezuela.

So I only say that because that is the argument they are trying to set up, and they are going to try to use the U.N. and the visit over there next week to sort of highlight that, but it is a fraud, it is a farce, and the people of Venezuela know it. They do.

It is funny, this issue has been in the paper now for six weeks. There are a lot of Venezuela experts now. But I have been dealing with this for five years. So has Senator Menendez and a lot of people on this committee. None of this stuff is new. It has just gotten worse because they are running out of things to steal.

So the second point that it brings me to is the loyalty. Yes, there are 2,000 generals. I would say that there are about six to eight of them that actually matter, and one in particular, Padrino Lopez, that actually matters, the guy who also chairs oil and gas. He has a day job and a night job, and his family meanwhile lives in Spain.

So the question really becomes their loyalty is not ideological; it is financial. Every single one of them is not loyal to Nicolas Maduro, not loyal to Chavismo. They are loyal to dollars, dollars—not euros, not bolivars, not Cuban pesos—dollars. That is what they are loyal to.

And hence, the less of that they have, the less reason they have to be loyal, theoretically anyway. And that is one of the things that we—this is no longer ideological. I am not saying Maduro is not ideological. He probably is a true-blue believer in the Cuban model, and he thinks that he needs to go through this ugly period of time to get to that point. But the rest of these guys, they like money, and they have shown that not just in the way they live but in the way their families live.

And that is critical to all of this, because in my view—and this is really my question to both of you. The formula that brings us to this point is a combination of three things. One is widespread unrest, which is already ongoing and is tied to the legitimacy of the government, the interim government. But widespread unrest—and we see that every time that Interim President Guaidó, despite Internet blocks, every time he speaks on TV, the Internet goes dark as those Chinese workers over there are helping him block the Internet at key moments, and yet he is still able to get hundreds of thousands of people into the street. Widespread unrest.

Number two, the loss of military and elite support.

And number three, continued international pressure.

And the combination of those three things ultimately leave Maduro with dwindling and very stark options, and I believe a safe haven for him, which is probably in Turkey or somewhere like that.

Is that not ultimately what needs to happen here? The combination of widespread unrest, loss of military and elite support, and continued international pressure that ultimately presents him with stark choices and either causes him to move out of the way in a negotiated exit, or causes those who continue to prop him up to force that negotiated exit and a new beginning?

Dr. ARNISON. I will start with that, Senator Rubio. I think what has struck me throughout this hearing is I do not think there is really much disagreement at all about what reality is in Venezuela and who is responsible.

On the question of sanctions not being the source of the humanitarian crisis, I could not agree more. The politicization of humanitarian aid was started by the Maduro regime by its refusal to admit that there was a humanitarian crisis in the country and by not allowing international support in. The hunger, the loss of weight, the lack of food and medicine, all of these have been longstanding and predate in many ways the sanctions.

My concern about the additional effect of the sanctions is based on talking actually to humanitarian workers inside Venezuela who are concerned not that people, rather than eating three meals a day, go down to two meals a day and lose 20 pounds, but there is actually widespread starvation, the kinds of things that are shown in this photo. This is why I think that it would be very important to channel some portion of U.S. assistance—not just have it parked on the border waiting to go into Venezuela—but actually channel it through the various organizations that have been able to maintain their neutrality and are on the ground and are looking for a non-political way to get that money in and get it out to needy people regardless of political affiliation.

The three things that you mentioned, the three factors—the unrest, the loss of military and elite support, and international pressure—I could not agree more that these are the ingredients for what will bring about change in Venezuela. The question is how do you increase the relevance of the second factor that you mentioned, the loss of military and elite support. That is, I think, the key issue that all of us that are concerned with the democratic transition in Venezuela should be focused on. How do we bring that about? What combination of carrots, sticks, off ramps, visas do we contemplate in order to get sufficient buy-in that there is a regime transition?

And then finally, I would just say that the widespread unrest that exists now that President Guaidó is able to mobilize may not necessarily last, and I think there is a concern broadly that time may not be on his side. The regime certainly feels that time is on its side.

I think it is important to remember that people who are starving do not mobilize in the streets. If you look at some of the old classics, *Why Men Rebel*, it is not absolute poverty. It is that rise in expectations, and I think that is why we are seeing, after the 2014 protests, this enormous outpouring of renewed street dem-

onstrations. That is not sustainable over the long term as the sanctions take their bite.

Senator RUBIO. My only comment on that is that people who are starving do mobilize. They leave, and that is what they will do. But the borders are closed.

Dr. ARNISON. Correct, correct. Exactly.

Senator RUBIO. I am sorry, Mr. Farnsworth.

Mr. FARNSWORTH. No, not at all, and thank you for the opportunity. I want to say how much I appreciated both your statement and Mr. Menendez' statement. I think you have encapsulated these issues very, very effectively and very well, very powerfully.

Just to add a couple of quick things, if I may. I do agree with the framework that you just laid out in terms of the three key aspects, and I also agree that the loss of military and elite support remains the key in some ways, and indeed the most difficult.

You know, the point that you raised, Mr. Rubio, about how you have some of the leadership, indeed all of the leadership of the military and security forces fully invested in the continuation of the regime I think is accurate. And why? Because the regime has very effectively bought them in through access to unimaginable levels of corruption, whether it is through PDVSA or different exchange rates or controlling the import of certain items like food. I mean, you have generals literally in control of the import of beans, and generals in control of the import of chickens. It is weird, right? That is not what militaries are supposed to do, but it buys them into the continuation of the process.

And then you have the entire system of drug trafficking that has not just been sort of allowed but encouraged as another way to buy some of these officials into the continuation of the regime and to buy off their loyalty.

So how do you begin to get at that? Because they are not the ones who are going to shift. They are not the ones that are going to go to Colombia and declare their allegiance to Mr. Guaidó. The first panel alluded to it a little bit, but we really need to go hard after the assets that these folks maintain outside of Venezuela—well, inside too, but outside Venezuela. Identify the assets, seize them, and cause them to forfeit them.

These are ill-gotten gains. They are stolen either from the Venezuelan people or through illegal activities. They have no call on them. So the international community, working together, I think that is a very powerful aspect.

And then the second one is one that the Administration has begun to explore more actively, and that is the whole visa issue. By taking visas away from individuals, I think that is powerful. It is equally powerful to either deny visas or remove existing visas from family members who may be in Spain or France or Italy or wherever. So if you can work together with other governments in Europe particularly, but also Latin America, this becomes a powerful incentive because now the ring begins to close on the individuals who are causing the most damage in Venezuela.

Now again, I do not believe that is necessarily going to cause them to change their allegiance to Mr. Guaidó, but it does provide a powerful signal to those underneath who are the most likely perhaps to change, that if they continue on the current path, their fu-

ture is not going to be a happy one, and if they switch, their future is going to be much better.

So it gets to the carrots and sticks issue that has come up several times in the hearing.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. I want to ask about Colombia. I think one of the best examples of the U.S. using a comprehensive approach to deal with a foreign policy objective has been the work in Colombia, sustained over Democratic and Republican administrations, and I would like to ask your perspective on how the current status in Venezuela affects Colombia, affects the peace process, affects the path toward restoring governmental services in parts of the country that had been abandoned for decades. Talk about what is at risk there and what we ought to do to protect the advances that we have helped achieve.

Dr. ARNSON. I will start. I think a great deal is at risk. I think that Colombia is simply unprepared to absorb the 1.1 million that are already in, let alone the million- plus that are going to be arriving in 2019 as the Venezuelan economy continues on its death spiral.

Colombia has, as you know, this fiscal rule that requires that there be a progressive decrease in the deficit. At the same time, it faces spending needs to implement aspects of the peace agreement that talk about connecting the rural to the urban and bringing state presence not only in a physical or security sense to these previous conflict zones but also opportunities, services, infrastructure. It cannot all be done. It simply cannot all be done.

I think that there is a great risk that without the resources, without the backing of the international community, Colombia will make very hard choices.

I also believe that the refugee flows throughout Latin America are going to have an indelible impact on the politics of the region for the foreseeable future. Just as politics in Europe have been deeply impacted by the influx of refugees from Syria and Libya and Afghanistan and Iraq and other conflict zones, and not in a good way I would say, I do fear that there will be similar impacts on the ability of countries to sustain liberal pluralist democracies.

I think that right now we are focused on the humanitarian emergency and how we are going to feed these people and give them access to medical care and allow their kids to go to school. We need to put out sort of an early warning about the impact on the political systems not just in Colombia but also in Peru and Ecuador and everywhere else.

Mr. FARNSWORTH. I fully agree. You know, Colombia has some difficult fiscal circumstances, and something has to give. I mean, you have a peace process that requires billions of dollars of investment, not just to implement the accords directly but also to develop the areas of Colombia to allow this peace to be sustainable. They have also had a soft economy which has to be revitalized, and President Duque is working on that, clearly. You have drug production now that has spiked. That requires new resources as well. And now you have a humanitarian crisis worse than any we have seen in the Western Hemisphere in the modern era. There is simply not resources for that.

So I think the international community can come alongside the Colombians to try to mitigate the worst impact of that.

But there is another point that I think also needs to be raised, and that is that Venezuela, under first Hugo Chavez and now Nicolas Maduro, has provided safe haven for FARC and ELN combatants. They are in some ways leading directly to some of the destruction of Venezuela. Now, it is not a political thing. It is not a guerilla force. They are not working to take over the government. But they are working directly in the illegal gold mining sector. They are working in crime and criminal activities. And they are working in drug trafficking. This is maybe left over from the Colombian experience, but it is still related.

So to the extent that the Venezuela problem continues to deteriorate and Venezuela turns toward becoming a failed state, and I do not know what the proper definition of failed state is, but to the extent that it is turning toward one, that gives greater permissiveness for recalcitrant elements of the FARC, the ELN and others to conduct their affairs in a lawless way, and I think that is ultimately not just self-defeating but it creates real complications in terms of reestablishing rule of law and revitalizing the democracy in Venezuela, if it comes to that.

So I really appreciate the fact that you linked the two countries together. They are together historically, politically, and this is just yet another example.

Senator KAINE. Very good testimony, very good hearing. Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the witnesses.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Just three quick points I want to make as we wrap up. The first is these nation states that want to be helpful, many of whom have expressed concern about some angle of our policy or statements, I think it is incumbent on them to step up to the plate. If they do not want certain things, then do the things that you are willing to do, the visa revocations, the additional sanctions.

I think we appreciate the recognition of President Guaidó, but there is more that can be done, and there are a handful of countries that happen to be the favorite destination of some of these thieves and their families, and we would hope they would step up and do more.

The second is, and it was touching on what you just mentioned, Mr. Farnsworth, I do not believe that the Maduro regime should be viewed as a government. It does not operate as a government. It is better understood as an organized crime syndicate. It operates like an organized crime syndicate. There is very little in the way of government on a daily basis. It is largely a group of people bound together by the ability to steal and make money.

But the way you collapse an organized crime syndicate is you recognize they are a bunch of thieves and criminals and they have no honor, and they end up turning on each other in their best interest, because that is really what it has become. I mean, that is, by and large, what binds that organization together. It is an organized crime ring which, by the way, sponsors terrorism. As you have outlined, the ELN openly operates in their territory and as recently as a month ago killed 20 police cadets in Colombia in a bombing.

And last but not least on aid and working with the organizations, that would be a great idea. The problem is that the current aid now is basically an open secret. These aid groups that are operating in Venezuela need to do so, but they need to do so quietly and with very little publicity, and if there is any uptick in the amount of aid that they are distributing, it gets noticed and scrutinized because it runs counter to two things, the Maduro regime's narrative that there is no humanitarian crisis—they just talk about how great carnival was and how all these people were at the beach.

So they are arguing there is no humanitarian crisis. That is number one. And number two is the more aid there is, the less people depend on Maduro for food, the less he can control them. So the problem is that these entities do not want to receive an uptick in humanitarian aid to distribute because it would imperil the little that they are able to do now.

As an example, you are a charity, you are feeding people in Venezuela today. If there is a significant increase in the amount of aid you are distributing, it might cancel your entire program because the Maduro regime does not want you to do that. Ideally, you would be able to work through those groups. But those groups do not want it because it endangers their small-scale existing programs now, and that is a real challenge that we have been facing here.

I know we have been here for two-and-a-half hours——

Dr. ARNSON. Can I comment on that briefly?

Senator RUBIO. Yes.

Dr. ARNSON. I think that that is, to a certain extent, true of the past in many ways. We should treat it as a hypothesis to be tested. The ICRC has announced a doubling of its budget for Venezuela. The U.N. is quietly, as you say, expanding its footprint on the ground, and they have to operate very, very carefully so as not to call attention to themselves, but I think there is definitely an effort, particularly in light of sanctions that everyone knows will expand the suffering.

I would slightly disagree that none of the oil revenue ever came in. Venezuela imports—I do not know if it is 100 percent of its food, but pretty close, in the 90 percent. The same with medicine. Whatever there is in the country depends on foreign reserves. The CLAP boxes are a form of political control. I completely agree. They do provide a subsistence level. If you take that way, again, I think conditions get worse.

So I do not really know what the answer is, but I think there are a few more subtleties to the situation that we should very much keep in mind.

Senator RUBIO. Just on that, it is true that they import their food, but the role of remittances is—there are entire industries of people that are sending family members food. There is the stuff sold on the black market for those who have access to that cash. There are the people, about 40 percent, who depend on the CLAP; and then, frankly, the people who have left because it is not enough for them.

In any event, we have had a long hearing. I appreciate both your patience and your testimony today, along with our previous witness.

I want to thank everyone for being here today.

We had a huge turnout. In my seven years, it is the best attended Western Hemisphere subcommittee hearing.

[Laughter.]

Senator RUBIO. And I want to thank the Capitol Police because they have been very helpful in channeling people in and out, as I know we have had a lot of demand to be in here. Again, I am just grateful to them for the work they have done.

The record for this hearing will remain open for 48 hours.

Senator RUBIO. And with that, the hearing is adjourned.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 12:31 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PAHO SUBMITTAL

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**PAHO'S RESPONSE TO MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE TECHNICAL
COOPERATION AGENDA IN VENEZUELA AND
NEIGHBORING MEMBER STATES**

Background

1. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, a federal state of more than 30 million inhabitants, has been facing a socio-political and economic situation that has negatively impacted social and health indicators.
2. Outbreaks of diphtheria, measles, and malaria have spread rapidly, affecting many states simultaneously. Other areas of public health concern are HIV, tuberculosis, an increase in maternal and infant mortality,¹ and access to medicines and adequate care for people with life-threatening chronic conditions.
3. There have been intensified population movements both within the country and to other countries, particularly Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago. In 2017, over 1.6 million Venezuelans migrated to other countries, raising public health concerns.²
4. Venezuela has increased its efforts to improve access to services, particularly at the first level of care. Health system fragmentation, combined with diminished capacity of the system to respond to priority needs, including core functions of epidemiological surveillance and the generation of health information, has impacted the delivery of priority public health services, in particular to prevent and reduce the impact of communicable diseases, and reduce maternal and infant mortality.
5. The health system in Venezuela is currently under stress due to a combination of factors, including health workforce migration and shortages of medicines and health commodities, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. This has affected the overall

¹ As per PAHO Core Health Indicators, 2017 (published) and MPPS Basic Indicators 2017 (unpublished)

² IOM. Available from: <https://www.iom.int/countries/venezuela>

operation of the health network and its capacity to rapidly expand its response to emergencies and disease outbreaks. However, the health system still retains capacity, including health infrastructure and the availability of human resources that can be mobilized and supported to implement immediate remedial actions.

6. The purpose of this information document is to provide an update on PAHO's response to maintain an effective technical cooperation agenda in Venezuela and neighboring member states.

Situation Analysis

Venezuela

7. Malaria cases in Venezuela increased significantly between 2015 (136,000), 2016 (240,000), and 2017 (406,289). This increase is mostly linked to the migration of persons infected in the mining areas of Bolívar State into other areas of the country with malaria-prone ecosystems, shortages or unaffordability of antimalarial drugs, and weakened vector control programs. Malaria risk from *P. vivax* (75%) and *P. falciparum* (25%) remains high. The export of sporadic cases to countries without malaria poses a challenge for early detection and prevention of complications associated with the disease. Other important risks are: the increase in malaria cases in border areas of neighboring countries, emergence of antimalarial-resistant strains, reintroduction of local transmission in previously malaria-free areas, and continued increase in malaria-related mortality.³

8. Measles has spread to 21 of 24 states and the Capital District in Venezuela. Between the first confirmed case of measles in July 2017 (Epidemiological Week 26 [EW 26]) and the end of EW 22 (June 2018), there were 2,285 confirmed cases, 1,558 of them in 2018.⁴ Imported measles cases have also been reported in Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador related to the migration from Venezuela. A number of deaths has been reported in indigenous communities in the state of Delta Amacuro (33 deaths), close to the border with Guyana. The spread of the virus within and outside the country is explained by many factors, including: 1) insufficient vaccine coverage, leaving pockets of susceptible population; 2) inadequate surveillance systems; 3) delayed implementation of control measures; 4) low capacity for isolation and adequate case management; and 5) high population movement across borders during the incubation or communicable period of the virus.⁵

9. In recent years, Venezuela has experienced a major outbreak of diphtheria. The first case was detected in the EW 26 of 2016. Since the beginning of the outbreak until EW 16 of 2018, a total of 1,716 suspected diphtheria cases were reported (324 cases in 2016, 1,040 in 2017, and 352 in 2018), of which 1,086 were confirmed by laboratory (350) or

³ PAHO Malaria Epi-updates. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2tlqeSj>

⁴ MPPS, unpublished presentation, June 13, 2018.

⁵ PAHO Measles Epi-updates. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2MBgBaW>

epidemiological-link (736), and 160 died (17 in 2016, 103 in 2017, and 40 in 2018). The cumulative case fatality rate is 14.7%.

10. New HIV infections are estimated to have increased by 24% from 2010 to 2016.⁶ The national HIV/AIDS program reports that 69,308 of the 79,467 HIV patients registered for antiretroviral treatment are not receiving it. Fifteen of the 25 antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) procured by the government have been out of stock for over nine months. There is also low availability of drugs to treat opportunistic infections and co-infections.⁷

11. Tuberculosis cases have increased between 2014 (6,063) and 2016 (7,816). Preliminary information for 2017 indicates 10,185 cases, an incidence rate of 32.4 per 100,000 population, half of them in the Capital District and four other states.⁸ Prisoners (15.7%) and indigenous people (6.8%) are those most affected.⁹ Comorbidities account for almost 10% of the cases (4.8% TB/HIV and 5% TB/diabetes). The recent lack of laboratory supplies has impacted TB diagnosis.

12. A progressive loss of operational capacity in the national health system over the past five years intensified in 2017, affecting the delivery of free health care and free access to medicines. Many hospitals are operating in challenging conditions and the Venezuelan Medical Federation estimates that approximately 22,000 physicians have migrated out of the country. This figure represents approximately 33% of the country's 66,138 physicians reported in 2014. The migration of physicians has predominately affected certain specialty areas (neonatology, anesthesiology, and intensive and emergency care). Similarly, an estimated 6,000 bioanalysts and laboratory technicians have reportedly left the country, and the National School of Nurses Association estimates between 3,000 and 5,000 nurses have also migrated.

13. Despite these challenges, the Venezuelan health system continues to have significant capacity in place. There is a network of 288 hospitals (levels I-IV), a network of 421 centers of ambulatory specialized care, and the community-based network (Red de Atención Comunal)¹⁰ with 17,986 primary care centers. The initiative "Misión Barrio Adentro", established in 2003, has significantly expanded primary care services to the population. In 2017, the Government launched the initiative "100% coverage of Barrio Adentro". This initiative led to important investments in health infrastructure and technology at both hospital and primary care levels and in human resources development (202 projects for rehabilitation, maintenance, and equipment for 80 centers of Barrio Adentro).¹¹ As part of Barrio Adentro, 23,990 "comprehensive community doctors" (MIC,

⁶ UNAIDS, 2017 Spectrum estimates.

⁷ Ministry of People's Power for Health (MPPS), 2018.

⁸ WHO Global Tuberculosis Report 2017. Available from:

http://www.who.int/tb/publications/global_report/en/

⁹ Ministry of People's Power for Health (MPPS), National Tuberculosis Control Program 2018.

¹⁰ Ministry of People's Power for Health (MPPS), unpublished report.

¹¹ MPPS, unpublished presentation, 13 June 2018.

Spanish acronym) have graduated in seven cohorts from 2011 to date. Additionally, 12,269 doctors received credentials in comprehensive general medicine.

14. However, immediate action is required to address short-term priorities, to reduce the impact of health workforce migration, rationalize existing resources while mobilizing additional resources, with the purpose of addressing disease outbreaks and increasing capacity of the system to provide comprehensive care for priority conditions. In the medium-term, opportunities exist to transform the health system to address the fragmentation and segmentation, ensure sustainability and improve health systems resilience.

Neighboring Countries

15. During 2017, there were 2,576 malaria cases (35% *P. falciparum*) imported from Venezuela to the state of Roraima, Brazil, representing 55% of all imported malaria cases in this country. Between January and April 2018, there were 7,043 malaria cases reported in Roraima, compared to 3,867 for the same period in 2017. There is an ongoing measles outbreak with 995 reported cases (611 in Amazonas state and 384 in Roraima state), 114 of which have been confirmed (30 in Amazonas and 84 in Roraima), including two deaths. In 2017, five cases of diphtheria were confirmed in four states and, of these, one was a fatal case imported from Venezuela. In 2018, Brazil reported 11 suspected cases of diphtheria between EW 1 and EW 20, but no cases have been confirmed. In response to the increased demand for health services in Roraima,¹² the Ministry of Health allocated R\$ 10.1 million per year to expand health care in this state. Roraima will receive an additional R\$ 9.6 million per year to expand hospital care and a further R\$ 500,000 per year for primary care in the municipalities of Pacaraima and Boa Vista.¹³ Migrants in Brazil have unrestricted access to health care and medicines.

16. In Colombia, 26 imported or import-related measles cases were reported up to EW 19 in eight departments and two districts, 23 of them Venezuelan citizens. Colombia has also confirmed five cases of diphtheria, with an age range from 3 to 27 years, three of them Venezuelan citizens. Local health authorities report that, due to the progressive increase in health care provided to the uninsured migrant population, public hospitals have already used up their supplies, leaving them unable to provide some treatments and causing difficulty in accessing services. In the departments of La Guajira and Arauca, local health authorities report that there is an increase in the presence of Venezuelans requesting medical attention (HIV/AIDS, TB, pregnancy).¹⁴ The government of Colombia enacted a resolution to provide emergency care to migrants.

¹² Roraima health department. Available in Portuguese from: <http://www.saude.rr.gov.br/cgvs/index.php/theme-features/module-variations/sala-de-situacao>

¹³ Ministry of Health of Brazil. Available in Portuguese from: <https://bit.ly/2jXDW9A>

¹⁴ National Health Institute of Colombia. Available in Spanish from: <https://bit.ly/2M3JMCh>

17. In *Guyana*, an increase in malaria cases was reported in 2017 in Region #1 (Barima-Waini). Additionally, at the national level, there was a slight increase in 2017 compared to 2016 (11,689 cases, less than 15%). Region #1 was the major contributor.¹⁵

18. In *Ecuador*, between 29 March and 12 June 2018, 14 measles cases were confirmed. Of these, 75% are among Venezuelan citizens.¹⁶

19. *Trinidad and Tobago* has received an influx of migrants from Venezuela in recent years. There have been no signs of measles and diphtheria; however, the Ministry of Health has reported an increase in imported malaria cases from Venezuela. Between 2006 and 2017, an average of 15 cases were reported each year. For 2018 (as at 20 April 2018), 12 imported malaria cases were confirmed in Trinidad and Tobago: nine cases from Venezuela, two from Guyana, and one from Ghana.

20. The indigenous populations living in border areas of Venezuela are highly vulnerable to epidemic-prone diseases. Of special concern is the Warao people, living in border areas between Venezuela and Guyana, who are now migrating to northern Brazil, the Wayu people living in the border areas between Venezuela and Colombia, and the Yanomami people living in remote locations along the border between Venezuela and Brazil.^{17,18} One of the highest HIV prevalence rates in indigenous populations in the Region of the Americas is among the Warao in Venezuela, at 9.5%.¹⁹ This population also has among the highest levels of TB.

Response of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB)

21. In response to the evolving situation in Venezuela, PASB has substantially intensified its technical cooperation with the Ministry of Health to enhance health systems management, improve the prevention and control of communicable and noncommunicable diseases, improve emergency management, and purchase medicines, vaccines, laboratory reagents, and other supplies for health programs, through PAHO's Regional Revolving Fund for Strategic Public Health Supplies (Strategic Fund)²⁰ and Revolving Fund for

¹⁵ MoH Guyana, unpublished report.

¹⁶ PAHO Epi-update Measles. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2MBgBaW>

¹⁷ Leis Municipais Manaus, Decreto Nº 3819, 22 September 2017. Available in Portuguese from: <https://leismunicipais.com.br/a/am/m/manaus/decreto/2017/381/3819/decreto-n-3819-2017-declara-situacao-de-emergencia-social-no-municipio-de-manaus-em-virtude-da-ainda-presente-e-intensa-migracao-de-indigenas-venezuelanos-da-etnia-warao-submetidos-a-situacao-de-risco-pessoal-e-social-em-especial-criancas-adolescentes-e-idosos-e-da-outras-providencias>

¹⁸ World Food Program. Available in Spanish from: <http://es.wfp.org/noticias/alianza-save-the-children-colombia>

¹⁹ Villalba JA, Bello G, Maes M, Sulbaran YF, Garzaro D, Loureiro CL, et al. HIV-1 epidemic in Warao Amerindians from Venezuela: spatial phylodynamics and epidemiological patterns. *AIDS*. 2013;27(11):1783-1791. doi:10.1097/QAD.0b013e3283601bdb.

²⁰ The PAHO Strategic Fund was created in 2000 by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) as a mechanism to improve equitable access to safe, efficacious, and quality medicines and supplies in the Americas.

Vaccine Procurement (Revolving Fund).²¹ This response was further strengthened in December 2017 with the activation of an Incident Management System, (at headquarters level and in country offices in Brazil, and Colombia, and Venezuela) and the release of funds from the PAHO Disaster and Emergency Fund and the PAHO Epidemic Emergency Fund, as well as the activation of special internal administrative procedures to facilitate fast and agile technical cooperation to the targeted countries.

22. PASB quickly scaled up its technical cooperation with Venezuela and neighboring countries. Targeting the various public health issues, since November 2016, PASB has deployed multidisciplinary technical field missions, involving the mobilization of over 50 personnel and has established six field offices, five in Colombia and one in Brazil. The expertise represented in the in-country mission teams and in the field offices spans several technical areas: emergency management, entomology and vector control, surveillance, epidemiology, health and laboratory services, health services management, immunization, cold chain, infection prevention and control, antenatal care, clinical management, public health, coordination and logistics, administration, and risk communication. In addition to its established presence on the ground through its country offices, PASB has completed more than 25 technical cooperation missions at national and sub-national levels to Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Guyana, the most recent being a technical mission on HIV, TB, and malaria during the current week. During a high-level mission to Venezuela, led by PASB's Director (12-15 June 2018), the Venezuelan President informed PASB of his authorization to the Ministry of Popular Power for Health (MPPS) to purchase a significant amount of medicines and vaccines through PAHO's Revolving Fund and Strategic Fund.

23. PASB is supporting the Ministry of Health in the implementation of its National Rapid Response Plan to halt the measles and diphtheria outbreaks. The plan is aimed at interrupting transmission of these diseases and includes universal mass vaccination for children aged 6 months to 14 years, extensive contact tracing, and associated laboratory work, underpinned by the mobilization of national, regional, and municipal rapid response teams. In addition to the rapid response plan, Venezuela is also implementing a national plan to increase vaccination coverage in indigenous communities, municipalities with low coverage, and difficult-to-reach areas. Already, more than 8000 personnel were trained in measles outbreak response in 12 states, including 3500 vaccinators. In collaboration with national and local immunization programs in the country, PASB has been facilitating the purchase of vaccines paid for by Venezuela through its Revolving Fund, with the following supplies and vaccines purchased in 2017: 1.15 million doses of pentavalent vaccine (these are already in the country); eight million doses of dT vaccine for the immunization campaign (four million are already in the country, with another four million to be delivered); 1,000 vials of diphtheria antitoxin; and three million doses of measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) and MR vaccines. PASB has also helped with the purchase of laboratory supplies for diphtheria and measles diagnosis. Together with WHO and the Measles Rubella Initiative (MRI), PASB has been exploring alternative support

²¹ The PAHO Revolving Fund provides countries and territories with guarantees of quality, safe, and adequate supplies of vaccines and related products, and lower prices.

mechanisms to ensure continued access to the MMR vaccine and to supplies for a nationwide mass campaign to interrupt measles transmission.

24. PASB has been exploring alternative support mechanisms to ensure continuity in access to ARVs and other essential medicines in Venezuela, along with key partners, other United Nations agencies, and specific civil society groups. The country participates in the PAHO Strategic Fund, which it has effectively used to procure HIV/AIDS ARVs, TB medicines and anti-malarials with its own funds. After a reduction in the level of procurement executed on behalf of Venezuela in 2016, in coordination with the MPPS, PASB has expanded its support for the procurement of high-priority medicines such as immunosuppressant drugs, medicines for maternal and child health care, medicines for high-prevalence chronic diseases, and reagents for diagnostics and blood banks. PASB has also provided technical support in the rational selection of medicines to optimize available resources, and in analysis of supply options for key strategic public health supplies.

25. Since April 2017, PASB has scaled up support to the MPPS to strengthen services in up to 21 high-priority hospitals of high complexity in major cities, including Caracas. Activities have included the training of staff on hospital safety and prevention of healthcare-associated infections, implementation of hardware and software for use of the Logistics Support System (LSS) for health supply management, as well as evaluations of essential capabilities within these hospitals. In addition, basic and complementary units of the Interagency Emergency Health Kit, which provides medicines and medical devices for 10,000 people for approximately three months, have already been distributed to 11 of these hospitals. Forty additional interagency emergency health kits are arriving for these 21 prioritized hospitals in the coming weeks.

26. PASB is also working with the MPPS to strengthen the national primary health care network, prioritizing 20 comprehensive community health areas (ASIC, Spanish acronym), 20 comprehensive diagnostic centers (CDI), and 521 community health centers (CPS) where Cuban medical cooperation has been present for many years. With PASB's support, professionals from many states were trained in essential methodologies to improve obstetric and other medical services, as well as detection and treatment of mental health problems.

27. Recognizing the challenges that malaria presents, the Organization has supported the purchase of malaria medicines and rapid diagnostic tests jointly with the Government, as well as provided training for health care workers and communication material to promote patient adherence to prescribed treatment.

- a) In 2017, 130,000 treatments for *P. vivax*, 800 complete treatments for *P. falciparum*, 300 treatments for severe malaria cases, and 300,000 rapid diagnostic tests.
- b) In 2018, 52 kits to treat severe malaria cases and 25 kits to treat (non-severe) malaria, for nearly 10,000 treatments, plus 20,000 quick diagnostic tests.

- c) More than 450 health workers trained in case management in the states of Bolívar, Sucre, Anzoátegui and Aragua.

28. PASB and Venezuela are collaborating on an integrated plan to prevent and control noncommunicable diseases. Action areas include tobacco control, care of people with disabilities, and early diagnosis and screening for cancers. The Organization is also working with the National Nutrition Institute on a project to improve the detection and management of acute malnutrition in children who are receiving care in communities and in centers for nutritional recovery around the country. Other health interventions are being coordinated with the immunization program, such as provision of vitamin A and antiparasitic agents to children under 5.

29. PASB has also scaled up response to neighboring countries (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago) and has established field offices in border areas or deployed additional personnel there. The activities are aimed at strengthening health system response in border areas, vaccination, and epidemiological surveillance at the local and national levels, to detect and respond effectively to the needs of Venezuelan migrants and the host population.

30. In **Brazil**, PASB is working with the national and local authorities to contain the measles outbreak in affected states. Residents and Venezuelan migrants from 6 months to 49 years old, mainly children under 15 years old, have been vaccinated against measles. PASB has provided technical cooperation to strengthen vaccination activities, including the establishment of a vaccination post in Pacaraima, in the state of Roraima on the border with Venezuela, operating continuously for 10 hours a day, seven days a week. As of 16 June 2018, 45,262 vaccines from the national vaccination program have been administered to 18,439 Venezuelan migrants. Support is also being provided to improve case management and investigation through the implementation of infection prevention and control (IPC) protocols, isolation rooms, hospital screening, contact tracing, training of health professionals, active institutional and community research, and laboratory capacity building, among others. A situation room was also established with the support of PASB to coordinate the response and monitoring of the spread of measles at the state level.

31. In **Colombia**, PASB is working with health authorities and partners to strengthen capacities at point of entry in Cucuta (North of Santander) for immediate care and immunization, detection and follow-up of measles contacts, active case finding in institutions and in the community, and vaccination of susceptible persons. PASB has also supported national and local authorities in *a)* the training of health care workers for rapid response to imported measles cases, case management, effective vaccination strategies, *b)* intensifying epidemiological surveillance; and *c)* strengthening diagnostic capacity by acquiring reagents for the National Health Institute and providing a virologist for expert support for the screening process for measles. PASB is also providing support for extra-institutional modalities of healthcare delivery (such as mobile health units and the distribution of personal and family protection kits for the reduction of health risks), thus improving the capacity for immediate response and the extension of services through the delivery of supplies and medicines to prioritized public health institutions.

32. In **Ecuador**, PASB has provided ongoing support to the national counterparts to strengthen epidemiological field investigation by conducting a workshop on rapid response to imported measles cases, aimed at activating a rapid response team at different levels of the health system and onsite technical assistance to nine health areas. Additionally, PASB is working closely with the Ecuador Ministry of Health in implementing initiatives to improve epidemiological surveillance, vaccination coverage, water and sanitation, and basic healthcare access for migrant populations, with emphasis on priority care for children under 5 years of age, pregnant women, elderly people, people with disabilities, and indigenous populations in the border area with Colombia.

33. In **Guyana**, the PAHO country office is working closely with the Ministry of Health to monitor the condition of migrants and strengthen epidemiological surveillance, information management, detection, verification, and risk assessments of events related to epidemic-prone diseases. PASB experts are also working with national authorities to assess immunization coverage and laboratory capacities to identify potential health needs in areas with migrants.

34. In compliance with the International Health Regulations, PASB disseminated updated epidemiological reports and alerts to Member States on Diphtheria, Measles, and Malaria.²² These included notifications of the increased number of cases in Venezuela and recommendations to implement a high-quality surveillance system that is sensitive enough to timely detect any suspected cases and to prevent the introduction and spread of measles and diphtheria through the vaccination of susceptible population.

35. According to criteria included in the regional measles elimination plan, if the transmission persists for 12 months or longer in a given geographic area, endemic transmission is reestablished. Thus, the Region of the Americas would lose its measles elimination status.^{23,24,25}

Actions Necessary to Improve the Situation

36. The following short-term and medium-term interventions are recommended to be implemented by the affected countries:

²² Epidemiological Alerts and Updates. Available from: https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1239&Itemid=2291&lang=en

²³ Reports of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Vaccine-preventable Diseases. Available from: https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1862&Itemid=2032&lang=en

²⁴ PAHO/WHO. Plan of Action for Maintaining Measles, Rubella, and Congenital Rubella Syndrome Elimination in the Region of the Americas: Final Report (Document CD55/INF/10, Rev. 1), 2016. Available from: <https://www.paho.org/hq/dmdocuments/2016/CD55-INF-10-e.pdf>

²⁵ PAHO/WHO. Plan of Action for the Sustainability of Measles, Rubella, and Congenital Rubella Syndrome Elimination in the Americas 2018-2023 (Document CSP29/8), 2017. Available from: https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=41210&Itemid=270&lang=en

Venezuela

- a) Urgently develop and implement a plan of action to stop transmission of measles and diphtheria.
- b) Reduce morbidity and mortality due to malaria, particularly in populations in conditions of vulnerability.
- c) Implement urgent actions to rationalize and mobilize existing resources to ensure the functionality of hospital services on a priority basis and address gaps in primary health care to respond to the immediate challenges. This may require contingency plans, interventions to ensure retention of existing workforce, short-term measures to address human resources gaps, and availability of essential medicines and supplies.
- d) Improve essential public health functions, including surveillance and availability of health information within the context of the International Health Regulations.
- e) Accelerate efforts to improve integration of health services within the health system, based on the primary health care approach, to address current fragmentation and segmentation. This will be critical to improve efficiencies and build resilience.

All countries

- f) Invest in and prioritize general vaccination coverage to reach at least 95% in all municipalities and communities and address outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.
- g) Strengthen the resilience of health systems in accordance with Resolution CD55.R8²⁶ adopted in 2016 and the Strategy for Universal Access to Health and Universal Health Coverage²⁷ adopted in 2014.
- h) Continue efforts to address the health needs of migrants in accordance with Resolution CD55.R13 on Health of Migrants.²⁸
- i) Scale up activities for the elimination of malaria in all affected countries.

Action by the Executive Committee

37. The Executive Committee is invited to take note of this report and provide any recommendations it may have.

²⁶ PAHO/WHO. Resilient Health Systems (Resolution CD55.R8), 2016. Available from: <https://www.paho.org/hq/dmdocuments/2016/CD55-R8-e.pdf>

²⁷ PAHO/WHO. Strategy for Universal Access to Health and Universal Health Coverage (Resolution CD53.R14), 2014. Available from <https://www.paho.org/hq/dmdocuments/2014/CD53-R14-e.pdf>

²⁸ PAHO/WHO. Health of Migrants (Resolution CD55.R13), 2016. Available from: <https://www.paho.org/hq/dmdocuments/2016/CD55-R13-e.pdf>